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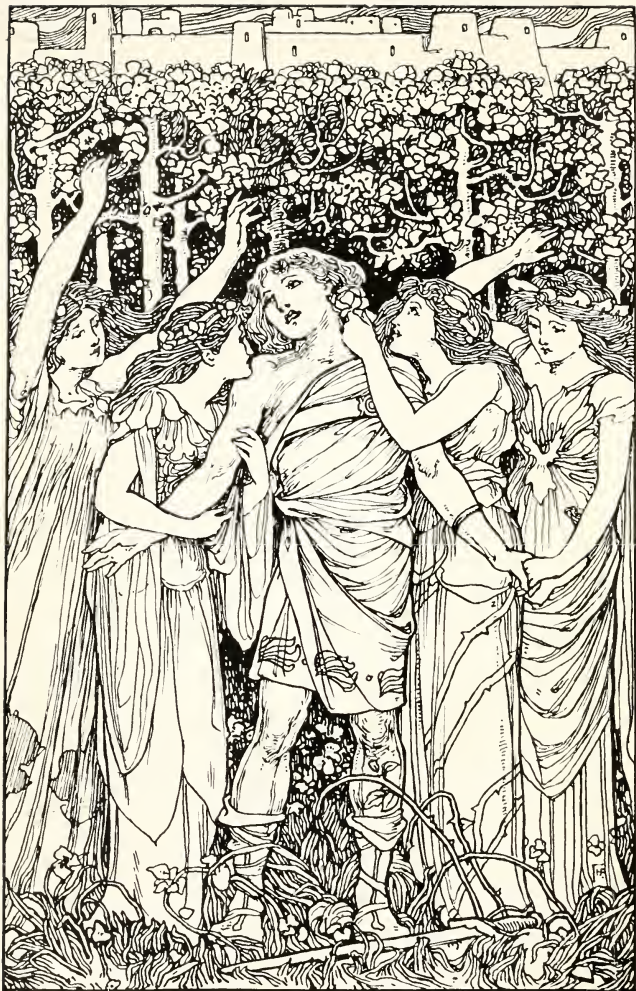
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WAGNER'S HEROES



PARSIFAL AND THE FLOWER-MAIDENS.



Wagner's Heroes

By

CONSTANCE MAUD

AUTHOR OF "WAGNER'S HEROINES"

With Illustrations by H. Granville Fell

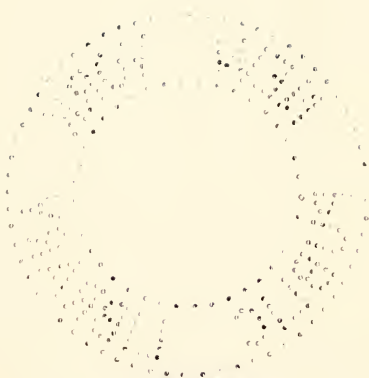
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PREFACE



THESE stories are for little people, and are not written for Wagnerites or any other learned persons.

So if any such should chance to open this little book, let them be warned at once that it is not for them.

These are just simple tales about men and women who once really lived on the earth, and about whom the greatest of poet-musicians wrote in that wonderful music-language of his which speaks straight to the heart.

And in this language he told us many things about Parsifal, Lohengrin, Tannhäuser, and dear old Hans Sachs, which cannot by any human

power be put into words; but in so far as he did make use of words to explain his marvellous music, I have tried to use the same, and above all never to depart from his idea of the heroes he loved.

It is true I have mentioned some things about those heroes not found in Wagner's text; but those who listen carefully when they see the Operas performed will hear it all in the music—even that account of the old Pope in his garden (for which I am indebted to Mr. William Morris' lovely poem in the *Earthly Paradise*); also the story of Parsifal and the dumb maiden, to be found in the *Morte d'Arthur*, and about the boyhood of Hans Sachs, which is written in an old German book, long since out of print, so it is no use looking for it!

But all I have said is true, and written somewhere—in the stars, if not in books; for it must never be forgotten these four heroes really lived loved, fought, and conquered—once upon a time.



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I

PARSIFAL



PARSIFAL



CHAPTER I



HERE was once a queen who lived in the depths of a lonely forest with her little son.

She was so sad that men called her "Herzeleide," which means "Heart's Sorrow."

Once she had been happy, the wife of a brave and noble king, Gamuret by

name. He reigned over a prosperous country, well beloved by all his loyal subjects, till one sad winter when a cruel war broke out, bringing in its train sorrow, desolation, and death.

The king, like a true soldier and brave knight, himself led his armies to the fight. With hope and pride he reviewed his valiant troops, their banners flying high, confident of victory.

But the queen's heart was heavy with sorrow. She thought of the homes that would be made desolate, of the slain and suffering on the dread battlefield; and no glory or gain seemed to her worth such a price.

She was, however, the daughter of a race of kings and soldiers, and knew that war must be; and men must fight, while women remain at home to watch, to weep, and to wait through the long days and nights of suspense.

So, when the day of parting came, the queen herself buckled on the armour of the king, and tried for his sake to keep up a brave appearance. The trumpets blew the signal to depart; the war-horses stamped impatiently in the courtyard.

The king clasped his wife to his heart.

"God have thee in His safe keeping!" he cried.

"Ah, leave me not, beloved!" sobbed the queen.

But the king was fain to tear himself away though his own heart was filled with heaviness and foreboding.

Herzeleide gazed after Gamuret and his knights till they were out of sight. She could see them for full many a mile, their armour and trappings glittering brightly in the sunshine.

"How many will come back again, and who who will be left on that terrible battlefield?" sighed the poor queen.

At first there were good tidings from the seat of war. Everywhere the king was victorious. All rejoiced, and even Herzeleide began to hope that the worst danger was over. But one dark day came news of a defeat. A terrible battle had taken place; many had fallen on both sides, and the brave young king himself was among the slain.

The grief and despair of the poor queen were indescribable. She only longed that death might take her also. But this was not yet to be. A little son was born to her, and for his sake she determined to go and dwell as far as possible from the haunts of men. Never, she vowed, should he know the life either of a court or a camp. He should escape the terrible temptation of the one and the cruel suffering and death of the other.

So with one faithful attendant the queen and her little son went to live far away in the depths of a vast forest in Spain. Here the little Parsifal was brought up, and he remembered no other home.

Herzeleide never spoke to him of his father, or of her own past. Parsifal lived a happy, peaceful life among the wild birds and creatures of the wood. He never dreamt there was a world in which men fought and slew one another, and where the greatest ambition of every youth was to become a knight, wearing armour and wielding a sword.

The squirrels and foxes were Parsifal's playmates. He knew all their ways, and every nest and hole for miles around. He was nearly as wild as they, and lived as free and joyous a life.

No one taught him save his mother Herzeleide and she was careful to keep from him all knowledge of the ways of men.

Once Parsifal asked her—

“What is the sun, my mother?—Who made it?”

And Herzeleide answered—

“The sun is light, my child. And the great good God who made all things, made light. He is Himself like the sun—all light and dazzling brightness.”

"I should like to see God," said Parsifal. "I will try and find Him," he added to himself, as he took his bow and arrows and went off into the woods. But he soon forgot his quest that day, in a wild chase after a wolf.

The old attendant who followed Herzeleide had early taught Parsifal to use the bow and arrow. He loved to make these weapons in every shape and size, as he sat with his mother of an evening, resting after the day's sport, and telling her his adventures. Sometimes it happened that he wandered far, and was late in returning. Then Herzeleide, her heart torn with fear and anxiety, would start out to find him, her call ringing through the sleeping forest till it was echoed back by the boy's clear, strong voice. And she would welcome him back with a joy and tenderness Parsifal could not understand, though it pleased him well.

They never wanted for food in the forest. Parsifal was a keen sportsman, and could hit any bird on the wing.

The old servant often sighed—

"Ah! what a soldier the lad would make! How like his father Gamuret he grows!" But he wisely kept these thoughts to himself.

So the years past by, and Parsifal grew up a fearless, daring youth ; strong, healthy, and well-grown as a young forest tree. He loved his mother with his whole heart, but all unconsciously ; for he had not yet learnt to know what love was, or what life meant without it. His mother lived for him, and he was the light of her eyes.

One day Parsifal had wandered far in the woods, when all at once his fine ear caught the distant sound of galloping. Nearer it came, and nearer. This was no herd of cattle or wild deer. The tramp was measured and orderly. Then came the sound of voices ; and presently, from his hiding-place in the brushwood, Parsifal beheld a troop of horsemen. They seemed to be clothed in shining light, and to shed such a dazzling brightness round them it was like looking at the sun. From their heads, which shone also, waved white plumes, and at their sides hung long, pointed spears of light.

"What glorious beings may these be?" exclaimed Parsifal. His heart, which had never known fear, was nevertheless awestruck at this wondrous sight. He remembered suddenly what his mother had told him, as a child, about light and God.

"Ah, these also must be gods," thought Parsifal. And plunging through the bushes, he threw himself

before the horsemen, and would have knelt, as he did before the unseen God when the sun rose every morning.

"Ho! What have we here?" cried one of the riders, reining up his steed. The others laughed heartily as they looked down on the wondering face of the boy.

"Are ye men or gods? I beseech ye, tell me," cried Parsifal in bewilderment.

"We are knights, my lad—soldiers of His Majesty the King," answered one of the number kindly; while the rest cried laughingly to each other as they rode on, "'Tis some poor fool, no doubt, who has been driven away to the woods to live by his wits!" and another answered—

"Heaven help him, if that is all he has to live by!"

"So these are knights," said Parsifal, gazing after the shining horsemen. "Knights! I never heard of knights! I wonder where they live, and what they do, and why they shine all over like the sun!"

A sudden determination seized him.

"I will follow them! yes!" he cried to himself; "I will follow them, even if it is right across the world."

The knights were already out of sight, and the sound of their horses' hoofs had died away in the distance. But Parsifal sprang up grasping his bow, and set out to follow them. He was fleet of foot as any hare, and doubted not he could soon overtake the horsemen. But the night fell, and he had not yet come within sight or sound of them. On, on he went, nothing daunted by the darkness, and so full of eagerness in his quest that he felt no weariness or hunger. The moon rose, and sent its silver rays glimmering mysteriously through the dark trees and bushes of the forest. Once it shone so brightly on a distant object that Parsifal leapt forward with a joyful cry, thinking he had come up with one of the shining ones at last. But, alas! it was only the newly-cut stump of a great forest tree, which the moon had lit up with her delusive light.

At length the morning dawned. After a short rest, and a hasty breakfast of a few wild berries plucked by the way, Parsifal was off again. On and on he went, trying every track of the forest; but no trace of the horsemen could he find, though he searched for days and weeks and months.

Over mountains and plains, through woods and forests he wandered.

Many were the adventures, and many the dangers

which befell Parsifal by the way. Twice was he attacked by the giants, as he passed the border of their wild country; but he slew them with his trusty bow, for his aim was marvellously sure and his heart knew no fear.

And many times he was in great peril from wolves and other wild beasts, but by some good fortune or other he never failed to escape.

So it happened that one morning, just as the sun was rising, Parsifal came suddenly upon a lovely lake. In the morning light it lay shining like a silver mirror, while the dark green trees and rushes closed closely round, as though to screen it from the outside world.

Parsifal threw himself down to rest. Suddenly a whirring sound over his head caused him to start up.

A great white bird, its wings spread wide, sailed through the air and over the lake.

"A bird on the wing! Ha! What a chance for a shot!" cried Parsifal; and raising his bow he let fly an arrow.

His aim was sure. The fair white bird swooped suddenly forward, fluttered to the shore, and sank to the ground, never again to spread its magnificent wings in the morning sunshine.

"Straight through the heart! It was well-done that time," said Parsifal gaily, as he sprang forward to find the bird.

But at that moment a doleful cry echoed round the lake. Before Parsifal could realise what had happened, he was surrounded by a crowd of wondrous-looking beings, in long flowing mantles of crimson, each bearing on his shoulder the badge of a snow-white dove.

Some of them stooped and tenderly examined the dying bird. The others seized Parsifal and dragged him forward, exclaiming—

"This is he ; yes, this is he who has done the woe-ful deed! See, here are his arrows! They are the same as that which has so cruelly pierced our swan."

Parsifal looked from one to the other in bewilderment. What had he done? Why was such a good shot a woeful deed?

The men continued angrily—

"Fool! Thou knowest not, it seems, what thou hast done! Our king was watching with delight that bird of good-omen from his sick couch by the lake. Full of hope we gazed at it, sailing joyously round. When in one moment all was over—thy accursed arrow had pierced it to the heart. Woe, woe be to thee!"

"Was it indeed thou who didst shoot the swan?" asked an old man, of a grave, dignified countenance, advancing towards Parsifal. He was dressed like the rest, but seemed to be one in authority.

"Certainly I did shoot that bird," answered Parsifal boldly. "I shoot anything that flies."

"Thou hast done this, and art not ashamed of such a deed?" the old man demanded sternly.

"Punish the ill-doer," cried the others wrathfully. But the old man, whose name was Gurnemanz, continued—

"Is it possible that thou couldst thus take away a life!—here too, in this holy forest, where every bird and beast meet thee as a friend. What had this noble bird done to thee? He sailed aloft seeking his mate, that they might float together over our peaceful lake. He was our joy and delight—what is he now to thee? Behold, here thy cruel arrow struck him! The life-blood flows still, his snowy plumage is all stained and darkened. The light has gone from his bright eye. Mark well that look!—what says it to thy heart? Speak, boy—dost see thy sin?"

Parsifal seized his bow with both hands and,

snapping it in two, flung it from him. His eyes were full of tears.

"I knew not what I did," he answered sorrowfully.

"Whence comest thou?" asked Gurnemanz in a gentler tone.

"I know not," answered Parsifal, sorely perplexed at the question. He had never heard of places with names, save only the names that he and his mother would playfully give to their favourite trees and rocks.

"Who is thy father?" inquired Gurnemanz.

"I do not know," replied Parsifal again.

"Well, what is thy name then?"

"I have been called by many names. I cannot remember them all," said Parsifal. His mother had been wont to call him by many fond names, and he knew not that in the world men pass with one name by which they are known.

"Methinks thou knowest nothing," said Gurnemanz testily.

"He seems little better than a fool!" he muttered to himself. Then, turning to the rest of the group, he bade them bear away the swan, and return to the sick king their master, who was down by the lake.

He then questioned Parsifal again.

"Something thou must at least know of thyself—say all that thou knowest."

Parsifal was sorely puzzled how to answer this. What indeed did he know! At length he replied—

"I have a mother, 'Heart's Sorrow' she is called, and we live together in the forest."

"His father died in battle, and his mother, poor fool, to save him from a like fate, reared him alone in the forest," cried a harsh voice from the brushwood.

Parsifal turned, and saw a wild, dark woman crouching by the trees, her glittering black eyes fastened on him. Round her waist was a girdle of snake skins, her long black hair hung round her face in loose locks.

"Yes, I was brought up in the forest," he repeated, surprised that this woman seemed to know all about him. "And one day," he continued, "I beheld, riding through the woods, some shining men on noble steeds. I longed to become one of them, so forthwith I followed them. Night and day did I follow after them in vain. Over mountain and valley have I come, defending myself against wolves and giants with my trusty bow."

"Quite true," laughed the strange woman. "They all fear the boy—even the giants themselves. He strikes so fiercely."

"Who fears me?" asked Parsifal in surprise.

"The wicked fear thee," replied the woman.

"Were they wicked whom I fought? Who, then, are good?" he inquired.

"Thy mother is good," replied Gurnemanz. "She whom you have left alone this long while, and who mourns and grieves at your absence."

The woman laughed.

"Her grief is at end! His mother is dead!"

Parsifal started; his heart beat wildly. A dread terror seized him.

"Dead!" he gasped—"my mother!—who says so?"

"As I rode along I passed where she lay dying. She bade me give thee her blessing, poor fool!" replied this strange being in a hard voice.

But Parsifal scarcely waited for her to finish. A blind terror and rage possessed him; his brain was reeling. Dead! his mother! The one being in all the world who loved him, and whom he loved! It must be a wicked lie, spoken by an evil being. He rushed at the woman and seized her by the throat, as though she had been some wild

beast who threatened harm to his well-beloved mother.

The woman struggled in vain to free herself from his iron grip; and harm might soon have befallen, had not Gurnemanz come quickly to the rescue. He tore Parsifal away, crying—

“What! again wouldst thou slay?—mad, senseless youth! What has the woman done to thee? She speaks but the truth; for Kundry lies not, and much has she seen and known.”

The mad passion that had overpowered him suddenly died away; and now, as Gurnemanz spoke, Parsifal felt only a terrible faintness. The ground seemed to heave under his feet, the trees to move round and round. He tried to remember where he was and what was happening, but in vain. Had not Gurnemanz held him firmly he must have fallen to the ground.

Kundry, for that was the strange woman's name, rushed to a spring near by, and, filling a long horn with water, she sprinkled the fainting boy and then gave him to drink.

“’Tis well done; good deeds turn away evil,” said Gurnemanz.

But Kundry sighed deeply.

“Alas, I never do good—I desire only to rest.”

She turned again to the thicket, and threw herself wearily down, as though she would fain sleep ; but started up suddenly, crying—

“No, I dare not sleep—the terror is on me. Woe, woe! The time has come!” and she forthwith disappeared into the forest.

Parsifal began to revive. Gurnemanz, still supporting him, said kindly—

“Come thou with me. ’Tis now the time for the holy Feast. The Grail will refresh and heal thee, if thy heart is pure.”

“What is the Grail?” inquired Parsifal.

“No man can say. But the knowledge will come to thy heart, taught by the Grail itself, and thou be fit to receive it. Come!”

He led Parsifal through the forest to an opening in some rocky cliffs. They passed through, and ascended a steep mountain gorge. The rocks arched over their heads. Higher and higher they mounted, up one corridor after another hewn in the gaunt rock. The gloom and darkness deepened with every step. The outer world and sunshine were left far behind.

And now Parsifal heard a marvellous sound ; at first far off and faint, but growing slowly in volume and power. Nothing like it had ever struck his

ear before : it was more wonderful and beautiful than even the rolling thunder in which he so delighted. Nearer and nearer it came, like a mighty voice speaking to the heart rather than the ear. In long, slow, vibrating notes it pealed forth.

"It must be the voice of God," thought Parsifal ; and a great calm stole over his troubled spirit, as the deep-toned bells rang on. He could think of his mother now without such wild despair. She seemed to be quite near him, though he could not see her.

At last Gurnemanz halted before a door. He opened it, and Parsifal found himself in a great hall, built in the very heart of the mountain. Tall marble pillars stretched up to the roof, which was painted in gorgeous Eastern colours. From the dome above streamed in the soft light of the far-away outer world.

Parsifal gazed round in speechless wonder. Never had he dreamt of anything so beautiful. In the centre stood an altar and a throne, and round these were circular tables covered with white linen cloths, and set round with goblets of shining gold.

And now a great door opened, and in slow, stately procession entered the men with flowing

crimson mantles whom Parsifal had already seen by the lake, marching round the temple they sang a solemn chant about the holy Feast for which they had all assembled ; but Parsifal understood nothing of what it meant. All was so strange to this wild boy of the woods.

Gurnemanz bade him pay good heed to what was taking place, and added, " If thy heart is pure, thou wilt learn much."

Parsifal neither moved nor spoke: he remained as if rooted to the spot, his eyes now fixed on another procession which entered the temple. Borne on a litter came the sick king of whom he had heard. He was surrounded by his knights and serving-men. Before him walked a band of beautiful boys, bearing in their hands a casket with the greatest care and reverence. Others carried golden vessels filled with wine, and baskets of bread for the sacred Feast. But Parsifal could not take his eyes off the king. Something there was in this pale, suffering face that he had never seen before.

The knights carried their master to the throne. The pages placed the precious casket beside him on the marble altar. Sweetest voices sounded from the heights of the dome. Parsifal wondered whether the angels sang like this in Paradise.

'The red wine outpoured for you.
The Bread of Life broken for you.
Take these, the Saviour's sacred tokens,"

chanted the clear, sweet voices.

There was a solemn hush. All looked towards the king. His face was pale and drawn with pain. He gazed round with a look of despair.

Then came a weird voice from behind the altar, like one from another world—

"My son Amfortas, art thou at thy post?"

The king shuddered, but made no reply.

The sepulchral voice asked again—

"Shall I look upon the Grail and live, or must I die without it?"

Then the king cried aloud—

"Woe, woe is me! Oh my father, come thou and resume the holy office of priest. I am unfit—unworthy. Live thou, and let me die. I, the only sinner here," he cried despairingly, "filling this high post, guarding for others this holy house, and dispensing to my brothers the sacred food of which I dare not myself partake!"

The king wrung his hands in agony of mind.

"Even the wound," he cried, "which is sapping my life with its ceaseless pain, is nothing compared to what I suffer in remaining here as your king

and priest. Oh, could I once again feel holy, how gladly would I die!"

He sank back exhausted. Parsifal feared for a moment lest he should in truth be dying. He longed to help this poor king. The cause of his dire distress he could not understand, but his heart ached with pity for him.

Then from the heights of the dome came a message, as from heaven; and the sweet voices sang again—

"Wait for Him, my Chosen One;
Taught by pity, He will come.
Wait thou for Him."

The blessed music seemed to soothe the tortured spirit of the king; and when the knights took up the chant, singing—

"Wait on in hope—To-day fulfil thy duty,"

the sick Amfortas with a great effort raised himself from his throne. Uncovering the golden shrine, he took from it an ancient crystal cup. Everyone in the temple knelt humbly at the sight of it. The place seemed to grow dark, as though night had suddenly set in. Then all at once a blinding ray of light shot down from above. The sacred cup glowed with a dark crimson lustre.

Parsifal remained fixed and motionless; he did not kneel with the others. This mysterious scene bewildered him. Amfortas took the glowing cup, raised it aloft, and slowly waved it from side to side, while all eyes were raised in reverent adoration.

“Oh holy miracle! The Lord greets us to-day,” cried the strange voice which had addressed the king as “my son.” This time the tone was joyful.

Amfortas set down the Sacred Cup, which slowly paled.

Gradually the darkness vanished, and daylight returned. Then the knights partook of their repast of wine and bread, chanting a solemn hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

Gurnemanz beckoned to Parsifal to join them; but he noticed nothing. Still he gazed at the suffering king, who had sunk back again with the same look of misery on his face.

What did it all mean? This beautiful temple—the stately knights—the heavenly voices, and that crystal cup which shone and glowed as though it were speaking to them! To what strange place had he come? And why could no one help that unhappy king and heal him of his wound? Parsifal was so lost in thought, he hardly noticed that the

Feast had ended—the sick king, the knights, and the Holy Grail had all passed out in solemn order. The temple was empty.

He was roused by the voice of Gurnemanz.

“Well! Still standing in the same spot! Dost know what thou hast beheld?” he asked sharply.

Parsifal shook his head. Many thoughts crowded through his mind; but he could find no words to speak.

“After all, then, thou art nought but a fool,” cried Gurnemanz angrily. He opened a small door at the side, and pushed Parsifal out, saying—

“Begone! And heed what I say: for the future leave swans alone, and seek geese—like thyself.”

The door swung to heavily, and Parsifal found himself once more in the open air, with the great forest trees arching over his head.

He walked on as one in a dream, not knowing which way he went. Once he looked back, expecting to see the outside of the wonderful temple. But there was no trace of anything—only the dense forest stretched far away on every side.



CHAPTER II



ANY years before Parsifal was born there had lived in this wild mountain country a good and holy king.

Titurel was his name.

One night, as he slept, a vision of angels appeared to him. They brought with them two precious gifts—the Sacred Cup from which the Saviour drank at the Last Passover, and which at the Cross received His blood, and the Sacred Spear that pierced His side. From age to age these had been guarded faithfully by holy men, but now, the angels told Titurel, they were in danger of falling into profane hands, for a savage war was raging in the Holy Land. Titurel had therefore been chosen as guardian of the sacred

treasures. This high honour and privilege he had earned by a holy, blameless life, without fear and without reproach.

Titirel built a temple worthy to receive the precious Cup and Spear, and founded an order of knights whose duty it was to guard them, and be ready to shed their life's blood, if need be, in their defence. "Knights of the Holy Grail," they were called. No man might lightly undertake this service. He must be pure in heart and life, and for many long years be trained and prepared before attaining to the honour of knighthood.

The Temple of the Grail was built on Mount Salvat, in Spain. The spot was so inaccessible no one could find the way, unless guided by one of the knights through the mazes of mountain gorges and winding passages. Parsifal might have sought for years in vain to find again the road by which he had come with old Gurnemanz.

Titirel and his knights guarded faithfully the sacred trust. Every day, when the sun stood high in the heavens, the Knights of the Grail assembled in their beautiful temple. Then the king, standing as high priest at the altar, unveiled the sacred Cup, and waved it to and fro before the kneeling knights: and the Cup would instantly begin to

glow with the miraculous red light which Parsifal had beheld. Day by day this miracle took place, and by this means the knights were perpetually renewed in youth and strength. Age and sickness had scarcely any power to touch them ; and far and wide their fame spread in all countries as the invincible Knights of the Grail, ever ready to fight for the weak and the distressed.

One day there came to Titurel a knight desirous of being admitted to the Order of the Grail. But Titurel, gazing fixedly at him, saw that his heart was full of pride and ambition, and that his inmost thoughts were evil.

"Thy heart is not pure. A Knight of the Holy Grail thou canst never be," said Titurel sternly.

Now this man was a great sorcerer, and had thought to join these knights because of the fame they had acquired through the power of the Grail and Spear: not because he desired a holy life. When, therefore, he was rejected by Titurel, his heart was filled with wrath and revenge. Never, he vowed, would he rest till he had got possession of both the sacred treasures.

"The Cup and Spear once mine," he said to himself, "all power will belong to me on earth. The knights and their king will then fall my easy victims."

So Klingsor, for that was the sorcerer's name, built himself a castle on the borders of the Grail Kingdom. He surrounded it with a beautiful enchanted garden, in which dwelt lovely maidens, most fair to look upon, but with evil hearts, like flowers that carry poison.

The fame of Klingsor spread far and wide. He was as powerful for harm as Titurel and his knights were for good. Also, he had a band of knights trained in his service, brave and daring, ready to die in doing his behests.

Many a passing traveller was lured into Klingsor's domains; and once in the sorcerer's power he never more escaped, for Klingsor's knights soon forgot even to desire freedom, and became his slaves for ever.

Now and then a Knight of the Grail had wandered into this fatal kingdom, and become the victim to Klingsor's magic arts. This rejoiced the wicked sorcerer more than all things else.

"That is good," he would say gleefully; "let them come, more and more of them! Soon I shall have their Cup and Spear; it needs but time and patience."

At length came a time when the aged Titurel felt himself too old to continue any longer in his

high office. He therefore called his son Amfortas to him, and said—

“My son, the evening of my life is come. It is fitting that I stand now on one side, waiting for my call to depart. Thou shalt reign as king and priest in my stead.”

So Amfortas became king in place of his father; and Titurel dwelt in the temple, awaiting humbly his time to depart. The daily sight of the holy Cup was the one thing for which he now lived.

Amfortas was no sooner made king than he determined to march out against Klingsor and his knights.

“I will utterly exterminate this Evil One and his followers!” he cried; “not one shall be left in the land”; and arming himself with the sacred Spear itself, he went forth, full of confidence in his own powers.

Klingsor, who was always on the watch, perceived him coming a long way off.

“Ha, ha!” he cried, with a mocking laugh, “here comes the new king! Armed, too, with the sacred Spear! He thinks to slay me, forsooth! I will prepare a trap that shall catch him and the Spear also.”

Then Klingsor called aloud—

"Come hither, thou, Kundry! I have work for thee to-day."

His call was obeyed by a wild gipsy-like woman, with glittering eyes and long, strangling black locks. This woman had fallen under the power of Klingsor, and was obliged to obey him, even though her whole soul revolted against the deeds he commanded. She was torn betwixt the powers of good and evil; and when not under the control of the sorcerer, she would fly to the Knights of the Grail, and serve them with her utmost strength. But directly Klingsor called, wherever she was, on whatever good deed of service, she was forced to go, as though drawn by iron cords, to the Enchanter's castle.

For long ages had this strange woman lived on the earth, struggling for ever between good and ill, knowing no rest, no peace. A terrible curse was upon her. Once when the Saviour trod the bitter road to Calvary, she joined His cruel foes in their mocking laughter. He turned and looked at her, and that glance was branded for ever on her heart. From that time she sought Him from world to world, but ever in vain. Up and down the earth she wandered, laughing always with that same accursed, mocking laughter whenever

her soul was most rent with anguish and the desire to weep. Death might not touch her. Tears might never moisten her hopeless eyes until one should come who could resist her power. Klingsor could do so with strength from below, but the strength of the Promised One must come from above; thus he should be enabled to save and redeem her from the curse and from herself.

Klingsor's command was now, that Kundry should transform herself into the fairest and most bewitching maiden, and go forth to meet Amfortas and entice him into the enchanted garden.

She obeyed the sorcerer's orders, and went to meet the king as he rode proudly towards the enemy's domain, followed by his knights.

At the first glance from her eyes, Amfortas felt a strange power coming over him, a spell being woven round him like a web. He made little effort to free himself, so irresistible was the magic glance of the enchantress. Leaping from his horse, he followed her swiftly as she pretended to fly from him. Into the enchanted garden she fled, and Amfortas after her, forgetting quite that in so doing he was entering Klingsor's kindgom, the sorcerer whom he had set forth to slay!

Eagerly, blindly he followed, and at last clasped

the fair witch in his arms. As he did so, the sacred Spear fell unheeded from his hand. Suddenly there was a terrible cry. Klingsor was upon him, had seized the Spear, and, piercing Amfortas in the side, rushed off with a mocking, triumphant laugh.

A deadly conflict then took place between the followers of Amfortas and those of Klingsor. At length with great difficulty the Knights of the Grail, led by Gurnemanz, succeeded in bearing away their wounded king.

Ever since that fatal day the wound of Amfortas had grown deeper and deeper. No remedy could heal, no balm could soothe it. The sole cure for a wound from the sacred Spear was a touch from that same Spear itself. As this weapon was now in the possession of the sorcerer the Knights of the Grail saw no hope of ever regaining it.

So a deep gloom had fallen on Mount Salvat.

The knights were full of sorrow and humiliation. They had forfeited one of the sacred treasures committed to their charge, and their king was suffering and disabled. To find a remedy for the unhappy Amfortas they searched the world over, but ever in vain. No one assisted them

more heartily than the strange dark woman, Kundry.

She came and went mysteriously, they knew not whither. For days and nights she would go on their service, riding her wild horse over mountain and vale, to seek some herb or balsam reported to possess healing power.

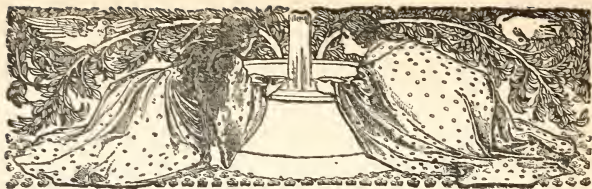
The morning on which Parsifal shot the swan, Kundry had just returned from a long journey to a distant part of Arabia. She had ridden all the way on horseback to obtain a balsam for the king. Flinging herself off her panting steed, she handed a small crystal flask to Gurnemanz.

"If this fails," she said, "nought else in Arabia can succeed!"

Gurnemanz would have thanked her gratefully, but she rejected all thanks.

"I help no one—thank me not," she muttered gloomily.

The knights regarded Kundry with great distrust, notwithstanding her services. Gurnemanz alone felt pity for the strange, wild woman. None, however, guessed that it was she who had tempted their king to his destruction in Klingsor's enchanted garden



CHAPTER III



ARSIFAL wandered on through the forest, thinking of all he had seen in the beautiful temple.

He longed to understand what it meant, and was sad that old Gurnemanz, who had at first seemed his friend, had dismissed him so roughly.

Far, far he wandered, caring little where his steps led, now that he had no loving mother to welcome him home and listen to his adventures with eager interest.

Parsifal wept sad tears as he remembered the wild Kundry's words, and the message of love she brought from his dying mother—that mother whose love was now taken from him.

At length he saw in the distance a turreted castle, surrounded by battlements. Parsifal hastened towards it eagerly, rejoicing in the hope of some fresh adventures.

"Here is a noble tower!" he exclaimed. "I will make my way over yonder great wall and see who dwells there."

Now Klingsor, the sorcerer, sat up in his magic tower, looking into a mirror of polished silver. This mirror was enchanted, so that in it Klingsor could see anyone approaching his domains when they were still far off.

Long before Parsifal had perceived the tower, the sorcerer saw him coming. He rubbed his hands, chuckling gleefully at the thought of a fresh victim.

"Good!" he cried; "another foolish bird flying into the snare of the fowler."

He gazed intently at Parsifal's reflection in the magic mirror.

"A-ha! but this is the most dangerous one of all," he cried, "for he is pure in heart and innocent. Here he comes, shouting like a child for joy at sight of my enchanted tower. Up, then! and to work!"

Klingsor's tower was filled with magicians' implements. A huge caldron hissed and simmered

on a fire of blue flames. Cross-bones and skulls, snake-skins and bats' wings decorated the walls. A flight of stone steps led down to a fathomless pit, dark as night.

Muttering a low incantation, Klingsor lighted some strong-smelling incense and threw it into the depths. A blue vapour rose quickly and filled the tower chamber.

"Arise! Come hither! Thy master calls thee! Kundry, appear!" cried Klingsor.

He was answered by a wail of anguish from the depths of the earth.

"Appear, I command thee! Awake! my spell is upon thee," called the sorcerer again.

Then slowly up from the dark pit came a shadowy form, half-hidden in the clouds of blue smoke.

"Woe, woe is me!" moaned the figure. "Thy curse is upon me. O Sleep, Death! shall I then never find thee?"

"Say where hast thou been roving?" demanded Klingsor. "Again with the Knights of the Grail, perchance? Those spotless ones!" and he laughed mockingly.

"Yes, I have been with them, serving them," answered the miserable Kundry.

"Know then, that will never help thee," replied Klingsor, with scorn. "The strongest among them falls my victim, as soon as I spread my net. Now heed me," he continued, fixing her with his evil eyes; "to-day I have work for thee: it is my turn to be served. A dangerous foe comes this way. Thou shalt entice him hither; then, with thy arms around him, he shall fall by the Spear."

"Oh, misery! I will not do this," cried Kundry.

"Thou wilt, for I command thee. I am thy master, and thou hast no power to resist my spell. Ha, ha!" he laughed, "thou didst manage well with Amfortas. That brought me the goodly Spear. Soon I shall possess the Grail also."

"Alas! woe is me!" groaned Kundry. "They are all weak—all perish, and I with them. Oh when shall I be freed from this curse, and find rest and peace?"

Klingsor laughed.

"When, indeed? He who resists thee setteth thee free, remember. So now try the valiant youth who is drawing nigh. Begone!"

He waved his hand imperiously.

With a terrible cry Kundry vanished into the darkness.

Meanwhile Parsifal had mounted the ramparts.

He scrambled up without fear, determined to force an entrance.

In the same instant Klingsor's horn blew the call of alarm, and Parsifal was surrounded on all sides by guards and watchmen. But before any could touch him, he had wrested the sword from a bold knight who approached him, and flashing it fiercely, forced him to retreat. Then he attacked the rest with might and main. One lost an arm, another his foot; but after the lesson with the swan, Parsifal forbore to slay. His enemies were struck with a sudden panic. It seemed to them the boy was no ordinary foe, his strength and courage were so great.

"He must be possessed! He carries a charmed life!" they cried, and, completely routed, they fled before him as fast as their wounds would allow.

Parsifal was left on the ramparts alone: he looked down. The walls on which he stood enclosed a wonderful garden. There were shady groves and avenues, sparkling fountains, and terrace after terrace of the most lovely flowers Parsifal had ever beheld. He gazed down in wonder and astonishment, for now from all sides lovely maidens rushed into the garden in wildest grief and fear.

"Alas! my beloved is wounded, mortally wounded!" sobbed one, and—

"My lover is gone; oh where shall I find him?" cried another.

"Where is this terrible foe? Who can he be?" they asked, looking round fearfully and clinging together.

Suddenly one cried—

"Ha! there he stands! See! on yonder ramparts! In his hand is my brave knight's sword. He wrenched it from him as my hero rushed forward in answer to the master's horn."

"Ah, miserable monster!" they cried, "cursed art thou for harming our knights and bringing us such woe."

Parsifal leapt down into the garden.

"Oh, fairest maidens," he said, "was I not forced to fight them?—they barred the way to you." Parsifal looked from one to the other with delight. "Never have I beheld such lovely beings!" he cried.

"Then thou hast no wish to slay us?" asked the maidens, much relieved of their fears and drawing a little nearer to the dreaded foe.

"Never could I do so!" he replied fervently.

"But thou hast wounded our knights!" they

sighed ; “ and now, alas, we have no one to sport with us.”

“ I will do that gladly,” answered Parsifal.

The maidens clapped their hands, and laughing gleefully they rushed off into the groves. Presently they returned, all arrayed in flower-dresses. One was a rose, one a golden daffodil, while others were marigolds, blue-bells, fuchsias, tulips, and peonies. Every beautiful flower, in short, seemed to be present, save only the lily, which was nowhere to be seen. The maidens looked so like real flowers, Parsifal could hardly tell the difference. He was delighted with these charming playmates. They flocked round him, dancing and singing, all their fears quite vanished. Then each one tried to push the other away, crying in turn, “ Away thou ! He loves me best — no, me !—me—me ! I am his flower—I alone !”

Parsifal stood in the midst of them laughing at their childish quarrelling.

“ You crowd of sweet flowers,” he cried, as they pressed ever closer and closer round him, “ how can I play with you ? Give me more space ! Do not quarrel.”

“ We quarrel for thee, beloved youth !” said the golden daffodil ; while a roes-maiden cried—

"Away with you all! See, it is only me that he wants! Come, come to me, sweet youth!"

Parsifal felt quite bewildered.

The air was laden with a heavy sweet scent, which almost seemed to stifle him as the flower-maidens crowded closely round.

"Oh, leave me in peace, fair flowers," he cried, trying to push them away, "or I shall depart from you."

"He is afraid of us, he pushes us from him!" exclaimed the peonies very much offended; and the sun-flowers remarked haughtily—

"Let him go! We want him not—he is but a fool!"

"I will take him, then," said the rose-maiden eagerly. "Come hither, dear youth!" she cried, holding out her arms to him; "none love thee as I do."

"Nay, nay, 'tis I love thee best; turn thou to me, beloved," murmured a convolvulus, clinging to his arm.

"Leave me alone—all of you," cried Parsifal, impatiently shaking them off. "Foolish flowers! I will play with none of you, since you are so tiresome. I will be gone."

He turned to fly from them, when suddenly a voice called from an arbour near—

"Parsifal! Stay!"

The voice was of wondrous sweetness.

He paused, while instantly the flower-maidens drew back.

"Parsifal!" he repeated in wonder, "that is a name by which my mother once called me."

"Stay, Parsifal! Joy and gladness await thee here," continued the voice. "Ye foolish, frivolous flowers, go tend your wounded knights."

The flower-maidens obeyed unwillingly; but the order came from one they dared not slight.

"Farewell, dear foolish youth!" they cried, and, kissing their hands to him, disappeared.

Parsifal looked towards the spot from where the voice had come. The branches parted, and he beheld a being so exquisitely fair, he held his breath for very wonder.

"Didst thou call me by that name?" he asked at length.

"Yes, 'twas I who called thee," she answered. "Thy father when dying so named thee. Parsifal! 'Pure and innocent one,' signifies thy name."

"And dost thou also bloom in this marvellous garden?" inquired Parsifal. He felt afraid,—why, he could not tell,—and trembled before this beautiful stranger.

No one could have recognised the wild gipsy, Kundry; not a trace of likeness remained. In her place was a woman fair as the goddess Venus, with a voice soft and cooing like a dove.

"Nay, Parsifal, my home is far away," she answered. "I came here but to seek thee, for I have much to tell thee of thy poor, sweet mother, Herzeleide."

At the mention of this name, Parsifal moved nearer, listening eagerly. He longed to hear anything of his beloved mother.

"Come hither, dear youth," and Kundry beckoned him to approach nearer. "I come from distant lands, where I have seen many things. Thy gentle, good mother was known to me," she said with a sigh, looking at Parsifal with soft eyes of tender pity. "Alas!" she continued, "how dearly did she love thee! How anxiously did she watch over thy childhood! Many were the tears she shed, remembering thy father's love and sad, untimely death. Her daily prayer was that thou mightest be spared a like sad fate, for thou wert the sole joy of her life; and I have seen even Heart's Sorrow laugh and rejoice when she held her little son safe in her loving arms."

Parsifal hung on every word with intense eagerness. Kundry's voice became ever more gentle and soothing.

"And when thou didst roam from her side, how anxiously would she seek thee, and with what joy she ever greeted thy safe return!"

Parsifal remembered only too well, alas! The tears filled his eyes as he saw what needless care he had often caused that loving mother. He drew nearer to Kundry as she went on with a sigh—

"Ah! couldst thou have seen her woe, when days and nights passed by without thy return! Far and wide she sought and called thee; but all in vain. No answer came save the echo of her own despairing cry. At the close of one weary day, hope and strength at last gave way. She sank down, never to rise again. Sorrow broke her heart, and Herzeleide died.

Here Kundry's voice trembled, as though her heart would break for sympathy.

"Woe is me!" cried Parsifal, throwing himself down at Kundry's feet, overcome by misery and remorse. "What have I done! O my mother, my dearly loved mother! thy son was thy murderer. O fool, thoughtless, blundering fool

that I was, thus to forget thee, truest and dearest of mothers!"

"Be comforted, Parsifal," said Kundry, bending tenderly over him. "There is consolation in the love that remains to thee."

But Parsifal was not to be comforted.

"Alas, my mother! How could I forget her! I am utterly worthless thus to have deserted such a mother."

"Thou dost repent, that is enough. Learn now to forget thy sorrow in this first kiss of love!" murmured Kundry softly. She stooped and kissed him, gazing long into his eyes.

And as her lips touched his, and their eyes met, it seemed to Parsifal that a terrible change passed over the fair face. Lo, the beauty was evil, the smile without joy; from her eyes looked forth a soul accursed, doomed also to be a curse to other souls.

Parsifal felt a horrible fascination drawing him mightily towards this woman, while at the same time all his soul shrank from her, struggling to be free. Her kiss seemed to pierce like a wound to his heart. And in an instant the thought flashed on him, "The sick king's wound! was it like this?"

Another moment and he started up, gazing in

terror at her whom just before he had thought an angel of beauty and goodness.

"Amfortas! the wound!" he cried wildly. "Ah, here it was in this enchanted garden that he received his wound! I know it all now; I feel it. Gracious Lord, save me, that I perish not also!" he cried, flinging himself on his knees.

Kundry gazed at him in wonder and alarm. She could not understand this sudden change.

"My noble knight, what ails thee?" she asked gently. "Fling off this evil spell and listen to my words of love."

"Ha! this was the voice that tempted him! Those the eyes that smiled on him, making him forget his soul's salvation and his sacred mission. Sorceress, begone from me!" he cried, springing to his feet and flinging off Kundry, who would have wound her white arms about his neck.

"Cruel one! Thou canst feel pity for others, but none for me. Know then, that through long ages I have waited thy coming. It is thy love, thine alone, which can deliver me from the curse which pursues me night and day. And, now, wilt thou spurn me and reject my love?"

She wept bitterly, wringing her hands in despair.

Then it seemed to Parsifal that again he saw a

change in this strange being. She was not all evil, as he had feared, but torn perpetually between good and ill—now under the powers of light and now of darkness.

At the sight of her tears a great pity filled his heart, and he said—

“Never could I deliver thee from thy curse, were I to listen to thee and dwell in this enchanted garden. All here is evil and accursed—haunted by the souls who have fallen and perished.”

“Nay, have pity, dwell with me but a little while; thy love alone can deliver me and save me from my curse. Leave me not!” pleaded Kundry.

“Repent and forsake this place for ever. Lead me to Amfortas and thou shalt find deliverance from thy curse,” answered Parsifal.

“To Amfortas! Never!” cried Kundry, her eyes flashing with sudden anger, and the evil power again overmastering her. “What is Amfortas to thee? Let the miserable wretch perish. Ha, ha! He fell, wounded by his own sacred Spear!” She laughed fiercely. And her laugh was more sad to hear than any weeping.

“Who dared to pierce him with the sacred Spear?” asked Parsifal sternly.

"That mighty one, under whose power I am and from whom my power comes," answered Kundry grimly. "Beware of him, for that same Spear awaits thee also, if thou reject my love in this fool's search for Amfortas. Ah, listen to me!" she implored, approaching him again with tearful, tender looks.

"Begone from me, sorceress!" cried Parsifal, thrusting her away. "From henceforth I will seek for the sick Amfortas until I find him. Now know I that my mission is to help and save him. Fool that I was to stray into this dangerous garden, and waste the precious hours in playing like a child!"

He turned to go.

"Help! help!" shrieked Kundry, in wild, frenzied tones. "Seize on the caitiff! Bar every passage!" Then fixing on Parsifal her gleaming eyes and raising high her hand, she cried, "Heed well my words! Here do I curse every path that leads thee away from me. Never, though thou search through the world, shalt thou find the one thou seekest. Wander, wander, now and for ever! And may he, my master, be thy guide."

In answer to Kundry's cry for help the sorcerer had now appeared on the castle wall.



KLINGSOR THROWS THE SACRED SPEAR

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"Halt thou!" he cried, in a voice of thunder. "Fool! now shalt thou perish by thy Master's Spear!"

With these words Klingsor lifted the weapon in his hand, and darted it with steady aim at Parsifal.

But the sacred Spear, instead of striking him, floated gently over Parsifal's head, and remained there, poised in the air. Klingsor beheld it with horror and amazement.

Parsifal put out his hand and grasped the Spear firmly. He alone could do this whose heart was pure, and him the Spear could never wound.

Then, brandishing the sacred weapon with joyful rapture, Parsifal made the sign of the cross, crying to Klingsor, "With this sign I conquer and destroy for ever thy cursed magic. Even as that wound shall close which thou didst deal Amfortas, so shall the earth now close over thy false magnificence."

At these words the ground shook and trembled with a mighty earthquake. Then, with a crash, down fell the magic tower and castle, shattered to ruins. The garden withered up suddenly like a parched desert, and the maidens, who had flocked back at Kundry's cry for help, all lay like shrivelled flowers strewn upon the ground.

Klingsor had disappeared.

With a wild cry Kundry fell to the earth.

Parsifal stepped over the ruined walls, and turning to Kundry, he said—

“Thou knowest where to seek, if thou wilt see me again.” He then disappeared into the forest, bearing with him the sacred Spear.



CHAPTER IV



ARSIFAL had now one purpose in life — to find Amfortas and, with a touch from the sacred Spear, heal him of his wound.

The knowledge had come to him in Klingsor's enchanted garden that he it was, and none other, who had been ordained to bring deliverance to the miserable king. Now, with the sacred Spear in his hand, he knew also by what means the healing was to be wrought. His heart beat with impatient longing to find the king.

Far and wide he journeyed,—north, south, east, and west,—trying every road; asking in every city—

"Can any man guide me to the sick King Amfortas, and to the Knights of the Holy Grail?"

Many had never heard of such knights, and laughed at him as a fool on a fool's errand.

Others pretended to know what he asked, and sent him purposely on a wrong path. To see him starting off down a rough road leading nowhere amused them mightily. One told him the Knights of the Grail had dispersed and the Order broken up.

"Doubtless," he said, "their king has gone to some far land in search of healing for his wound."

Another related how he had heard for sure "the king was dead." But this, Parsifal steadfastly refused to believe.

From each one he heard some new tale, till, in despair, at last he ceased to have faith in any.

To search the world over till he should find Amfortas became, however, his fixed purpose. Once, having travelled north, even as far as the land of Brittany, Parsifal met a knight, Sir Tristram by name. He was of a noble though mournful aspect. This knight told him of a certain king who dwelt at Camelot, in England, over the seas.

"Go to King Arthur," he said. "He is the very

flower of knighthood and chivalry. Hast thou not heard of his far-famed Order of Knights of the Round Table? Pledged in a common bond are we all (for I am proud to be of their number) to succour distress and right the wrong. Seek King Arthur; perchance he can tell thee of Amfortas."

Parsifal looked into the sad eyes of Sir Tristram, and knew he would not deceive him. Willingly would he have brought some comfort to this knight, whose spirit seemed so heavy with sorrow; but their ways lay far apart.

So, thanking the sad knight for his friendly counsel, he took a ship and came at last to England. At the court of King Arthur, Parsifal found a kinsman of his father, King Gamuret. He was a powerful prince, and a Knight also of the famous Round Table. This kinsman gave Parsifal a hearty welcome, and made him relate many of his adventures and the conflicts he had come through.

"Thou art verily worthy to be a knight!" he declared; and forthwith begged the noble King Arthur that he would confer on his young kinsman Parsifal the honour of knighthood. The king consented to grant this boon when he heard

that Parsifal was a son of his former friend Gamuret—"as valiant a soldier and noble a king as ever drew sword," said he; "and may his son prove worthy of him!"

So Parsifal became a knight and was admitted to the noble Order of the Round Table. But some of Arthur's knights and barons despised him for his ignorance in all court manners and knightly exercises, such as tilting, jousting, and the use of arms.

"He will never prove a good knight," they said.

And when the king and his knights were set at table, Parsifal was bidden to a humble seat, far from the king and nobles of the court.

Now there was a high-born maiden in the queen's court who was dumb and had never all her life spoken a word. Suddenly this maiden entered the hall where they sat, and going straight up to Parsifal, she took him by the hand, saying—

"Arise, Sir Parsifal, thou noble knight, God's knight, and go with me."

Then she led him to the seat which was counted of most honour—that next to the king's own.

"Fair knight," she said, "take here thy seat, for this belongeth to thee, and to none other." So

saying she departed, and a few hours after the holy maiden died.

The king and all present were astounded at this miracle. It was as if a voice had been sent from heaven to bid them honour the stranger knight; and from that time they rejoiced to make him one of their company.

Parsifal did not delay to inquire of King Arthur and his knights if any could tell him of Amfortas; but nowhere could he hear of any who knew the Knights of the Holy Grail or their sick king.

By the advice of his kinsman, however, Parsifal continued to dwell some time at the court of King Arthur, in order to make himself a perfect knight and soldier. And this he did to such good purpose that soon there were few among the Knights of the Round Table who could excel him in all knightly exercises.

Many were the adventures that befell him, and many the battles he fought. Everywhere he was victorious; so that before long his fame spread far and wide as a mighty knight, of such prowess and valour no man could withstand him.

Wherever he went, Parsifal carried always at his side the sacred Spear. With his sword he defended it faithfully; and never did he allow himself to use

it in self-defence, however hard he was pressed. Often he was wounded severely while guarding his sacred trust, but he came at last safely through all dangers.

There was much sorrow and lamenting when one day Parsifal told the king and his brave knights that he must leave them.

"I must continue my search, most noble king; for that has been given me to accomplish, and this sacred Spear must I safely deliver to the Brothers of the Grail. It grieveth me sorely to bid farewell to thee and all this noble company, where nought but goodness has been shown me."

"Thou must surely come again, Sir Parsifal," said the king, clasping his hand. "Thou art very dear to us, and ill can we spare thee from our midst."

"I will surely come again when my mission is fulfilled, most noble king! for I fain would look upon thy face once more,—thou, who didst with thine own hand create me knight, and whom it has ever been my highest honour to serve."

Many blessings and tears followed Parsifal as he set sail for distant lands, and waved farewell to the English shore.

The ship bore him southward; and to many

strange countries he went, seeking everywhere for Amfortas, but finding him never. Many a time he was on the verge of despair ; but still he continued his difficult quest, determined not to give it up so long as life should last.



CHAPTER V



MEANWHILE, as the years passed away, sad changes came to the Knights of the Grail.

Amfortas became ever more despairing, his wound ever more agonising. Since the morning when Parsifal beheld the service in the Grail temple, the sick king had not once unveiled the Holy Cup. No prayers or entreaties could prevail with him. The knights, when they were no longer able to renew their strength and youth with the sight of the holy miracle, grew weak and weary, and fell into a careless, indifferent life.

Many left the Order and wandered away into strange lands.

Others still remained, in hopes that some day the blessed prophecy would be fulfilled, and "One would come, taught by pity," who would restore their fallen Brotherhood.

The aged Titurel lived on, but his life was full of sorrow.

Gurnemanz became a solitary hermit, dwelling in the forest, in a small wooden hut made with his own hands. His food was of the simplest: wild roots and berries, with water drawn from a sacred spring.

Sometimes he would enter the deserted temple, and there weep alone for the days that were gone by. No deep-toned bells now called the Brothers to their daily feast. No sacred Spear swung like a ray of light above the altar. No Holy Grail waved to and fro, blessing the kneeling knights with the sight of its miraculous light. All was gloom and sadness. Gurnemanz, his heart heavy with sorrow, often prayed that he might die before worse misfortunes came to pass. In his time, he feared, no deliverer would ever come. Once he had seen a youth, of a frank, fearless countenance, whose heart seemed innocent and pure. Gurnemanz had hoped this might prove to be "the promised one"; but, alas, it was a wild hope!—the

youth had shown himself a mere ignorant fool, incapable of understanding anything, and Gurnemanz had sent him away impatiently. Since then things had gone from bad to worse with the Brothers of the Grail, and hope of a better time to come was well-nigh dead.

It was the dawn of a fair morning in early spring; the trees were still clothed in their first tender green; the meadows were bright with star-like flowers; the birds sang, their hearts overflowing with joy; and all the earth seemed flooded with sunshine and happiness—when suddenly a moaning sound of pain broke on the peaceful calm.

Gurnemanz stepped out of his hermit's hut. Bent with age, he leant heavily on his staff. He had risen before the first ray of sunlight danced across the lake, for this was Good Friday morning: the most solemn and blessed of all days in the year to the holy hermit.

Gurnemanz stood still and listened.

"Methought I heard a groan," he said to himself. "It can be no bird or beast, for all are happy in this holy forest. Some poor wanderer must have strayed this way."

He went towards a thicket, and parted the thickly-growing branches. On the ground lay a

woman, apparently dead. With a cry of surprise Gurnemanz stooped and touched her hand. It was cold and stiff. He looked at her face.

"Kundry!" he cried. "Can it indeed be she? How long can she have lain here? Awake!" he said, trying to rouse her. "Awake to this joyous day of spring."

But she neither moved nor spoke.

Gurnemanz began to fear she was indeed dead.

"Yet," he said to himself, "it was her groan I heard just now; and often in the old days this deep, death-like sleep would fall upon her."

With great effort, for he was feeble with age, Gurnemanz dragged the lifeless woman out of the thorny thicket and laid her on a grassy bank. Then he rubbed her hands and sprinkled her face with water, using every effort to restore her. At last Kundry stirred and opened her eyes. She started as if in fear, but on recognising old Gurnemanz, a look of relief and peace came into her face.

Kundry had greatly changed. She was pale and worn, but no longer wild or restless. Her dress was a long brown robe, such as a penitent would wear, fastened round the waist with a cord. As soon as she could move, she rose, and,

without speaking, went slowly towards the hermit's hut.

"Hast thou no word of thanks?" asked Gurnemanz. "Know that I waked thee from a sleep of death."

Kundry gazed at him with grateful eyes.

"Let service be my thanks," she answered humbly.

Her voice was low and broken; she bowed her head meekly as she spoke.

Gurnemanz wondered at this great change. Could this be the wild Kundry of olden days? What had happened to her? Kundry entered the hut, and coming out with a pitcher, went to fill it at the well.

"How gentle and quiet she is, and how anxious to be of use," thought the old man. "Can it be the blessed Good Friday that has so softened her spirit?"

All at once Kundry beckoned Gurnemanz to look at someone whom she saw in the distance coming towards them.

Slowly and wearily a strange knight approached. He was clad from head to foot in black armour. His helmet was closed, so they could not see his face. In one hand he carried a long spear.

Without appearing to see anyone, he passed close by Gurnemanz, and sat down on a bank near the spring.

"Sir Knight, can I assist thee?" asked Gurnemanz. "Perchance, hast thou lost thy way?"

The stranger shook his head—he seemed too tired even to speak.

"In case thou art bound by a vow of silence," said Gurnemanz, "let me tell thee where thou art come. This is a holy forest. Here no man carries weapons or armour. All live in peace—man, bird, and beast. And to-day especially of all others! Knowest thou what day has just dawned?"

The strange knight again shook his head.

"From what heathen land, then, dost thou come?" asked Gurnemanz reproachfully. "Knowest thou not that this is the morn of the ever-blessed Good Friday? I pray thee, lay aside this armour and these grievous weapons, which so ill befit the sacred day."

In answer, the knight then rose and slowly struck the spear he carried upright into the ground. He next took off his helmet and laid it at the foot of the spear, together with his shield and sword. No word did he speak, but knelt down reverently

before the spear, and joined his hands in silent prayer.

Gurnemanz watched the mysterious knight in wonder. Clearly he was no heathen, even though he did not know that this was the most sacred of all days in the year.

As the knight raised his eyes to the spear the morning light shone full on his face. Gurnemanz started. That face! He had seen it before—yes, surely! Much changed, but yet the same. He beckoned eagerly to Kundry, who stood at the door of the hut. She, too, was watching the knight. She, too, had seen that face before, and well she remembered where.

“Dost thou know who this is?” Gurnemanz asked her.

Kundry nodded her head in silent assent.

“It is he who long ago killed our swan—that same youth whom I sent in anger from the temple! And lo!” he cried joyfully, as he gazed fixedly at the upright spear, “oh thrice-blessed day! my eyes behold it once again—our sacred Spear!”

Joyful tears filled the eyes of the aged hermit. His years of patient waiting were at last rewarded.

The armour-clad knight rose from his knees, and turning, for the first time recognised Gurnemanz.

"Heaven be thanked that I have at last found thee again!" he cried, stretching out his hand in joyful greeting.

"Dost thou know me indeed? I am sorely changed by grief and age," said the old man. "But tell me from whence thou art, and how thou camest here?"

"My road has been long and painful," answered Parsifal, "but now at last I greatly hope the goal is reached, unless I err again. Oh tell me, is this indeed the holy forest of the Grail's dominions?"

"It is in truth," replied Gurnemanz. "But whom seekest thou here?"

"I seek one whom I beheld once long years ago, in deepest sorrow and suffering. I was then an ignorant fool, understanding nothing. But I have learnt since that it is I who am ordained to bring healing to that unhappy one. Through the wide world I have sought him. For long years wandering up and down the earth, driven hither and thither by a curse which doomed me never to find the right path."

Kundry covered her face with her hands as she heard these words. With bitter woe she remembered how, in the sorcerer's garden, she had cursed his path. The knight had not yet noticed her

presence, and she moved farther away, to where she could watch him unobserved.

Parsifal continued to Gurnemanz—

“And what thou seest here, shining like a ray of light, is none other than the sacred Spear, which I have borne with me through all my journeyings, that I might one day restore it to the Brothers of the Grail.”

“Oh blessed miracle, once again to behold it!” The old man gazed in rapture at the Spear.

“Great knight,” he said, “if it was a curse that caused thee so long to wander, be sure it has departed; for now thou art come to the kingdom of the Grail. Here we await thee, longing for years past for thy promised coming. Verily thou art he of whom the prophecy spake. We have no leader—our heroes’ strength is gone. The king grows daily worse, refusing any more to unveil the Holy Grail. Titurel, the aged saint, is dead; this day we celebrate his funeral.”

“Alas, woe is me!” groaned Parsifal. “Have I, after all my toil, come too late?” Overcome with grief and despair, he sank down by the spring.

“Nay, nay, my noble knight,” said Gurnemanz, “despair not thus!” Thy sacred office awaits thee

even to-day. This holy fountain will revive thee, and remove thy travel-stains.

Kundry came forward eagerly to help Gurnemanz, and together they removed the black armour which encased the exhausted knight. Then taking some water from the sacred spring, Kundry bathed the weary feet of Parsifal. So quietly and humbly did she perform her services, that he did not notice who it was tending and helping him.

"Shall I be guided this day to Amfortas?" he asked wearily.

"Surely shalt thou," Gurnemanz answered. "To-day, for the last time, the king has consented to unveil the Grail, at the celebration of his father's funeral."

So at last Parsifal knew that he had indeed found Amfortas. His prayer was answered. And now he saw, with wonder and joy, that she who knelt so humbly at his feet was none other than that Kundry from whom he had parted years ago in the enchanted garden. He gazed at her, marveling greatly as he noted how changed she was. Truly her curse had been removed—evil had no longer power over her! Parsifal's heart was filled with joy and thanksgiving for her deliverance.

"Thou hast washed and anointed my feet," he

said gently to Kundry; and taking from her hand the golden flask of ointment, he turned to Gurnemanz: "Now, do thou anoint also my head, O friend of Titurel, that to-day I may enter upon my sacred duties."

"Ay, thus it was foretold! Our king indeed thou art," said Gurnemanz, with reverence. "The promised deliverer—the blessed one. 'Taught by pity'—'wise through suffering.' My blessing on thee!" So saying, he poured the contents from Kundry's little flask on the head of Parsifal, while happy tears dimmed his aged eyes. "Come now," he added, "come to the unhappy Amfortas."

"First I have a duty here," answered Parsifal; and, bending over the kneeling Kundry, he took some water from the sacred spring and sprinkled her head.

"Let me now baptize thee," he said. "For evermore trust thou in that Holy One who redeems us all."

Kundry bowed her head; and then the tears which, under her curse, had been so long denied her, flowed once again. Kundry wept; but they were tears of joy and peace, refreshing her soul like dew on a parched-up plain.

"How fair and peaceful the world is to-day!"

said Parsifal, as he looked round on the woods and meadows, bright with flowers and sunshine.

"It is Good Friday's spell, Sir Knight," replied Gurnemanz. "Everything that has life rejoices on this sacred day."

"Methinks on such a day all must surely mourn and sorrow!" answered Parsifal in surprise.

Gurnemanz shook his head.

"Nay, not so. All creation rejoices that to-day the Redeemer's work was completed. The tears of repentant sinners, sprinkling the earth with a holy rain, cause these fair flowers to burst into brighter bloom and fill the air with a rarer fragrance this day than on any other in the year.

Kundry raised her head and gazed in reverent adoration at Parsifal: he who resisted her in the sorcerer's garden long ago, and thus redeemed and saved her from the curse! Her heart was too full for speech; but with pleading eyes she besought his forgiveness. And Parsifal, who once had seen in those same eyes the reflection of a soul accursed, now beheld the peaceful look of a soul restored. Solemnly he bent and kissed her softly on the brow.

"Blessed be thy tears," he said. "See! earth and heaven smile on thee and rejoice."

And now the great bells of the Grail Temple began to peal forth slowly and solemnly.

Gurnemanz went to his hut and brought forth a coat of mail and mantle for Parsifal, such as were worn by the Knights of the Grail. Then, taking in his hand the sacred Spear, Parsifal was guided by Gurnemanz once again through the winding rock-cut corridors to the temple, which he had first seen as an ignorant youth. Kundry followed them humbly from afar. She, too, would fain behold the Holy Grail.

In the beautiful temple, meanwhile, a sad scene was taking place.

Once more the knights had assembled. The tables were spread for the sacred Feast, and the Holy Grail placed on the high altar. The coffin of the departed King Titurel rested on a bier, and the knights gazed at it in deep sorrow and mourning.

All were waiting for Amfortas to perform the sacred ceremony of unveiling the Grail. He had consented to do this once again, in honour to his father's memory. But no sooner did the unhappy king find himself standing by the long-neglected altar than he repented his promise. Shame and despair seized him, together with a great fear that

if he beheld the Grail again, his wretched life would be prolonged by the sight.

“Nay, I can bear it no longer,” he cried, rushing down among the knights. “Already I feel the welcome touch of death’s cold hand upon me, and shall I return to life and woe? Nay, no one shall force me to live. Here, slay me as I stand! I beseech you, kill the sinner together with his tortures. Then may you once more behold the Grail under a worthier king.”

The knights shuddered and shrank back from the miserable king. Amfortas stood alone, his face haggard with suffering and woe. There was a moment of breathless waiting. Then a strange voice, deep-toned and clear, cried—

“One weapon only can end thy pain!
That same Spear which gave the wound.”

With these words Parsifal came forward, and stretching out the sacred Spear, he touched Amfortas on the side.

“Be thou healed,” he said, “pardoned and purified. Blessed be thy sufferings, for by them was an ignorant fool taught the wisdom which comes alone through sympathy, and so led to restore once more the blessed Spear. I have been ordained

to bring thee healing, and from henceforth to reign in this holy office."

The instant the Spear touched Amfortas his face lit up with a joy unspeakable. Light and life returned to his soul: health and vigour to his body. The wound was completely and miraculously healed. For very wonder and astonishment he would have fallen to the ground, had not old Gurnemanz upheld him.

The knights gazed in adoration and delight at their long-lost Spear, and at the mysterious leader who had come at last in fulfilment of the blessed prophecy.

"Unveil the Grail! Open the shrine!" said Parsifal. Then mounting the altar steps, he took out the Sacred Cup and reverently waved it to and fro, while the knights knelt humbly round—Amfortas among them, happy and restored.

Kundry crept quietly to the lowest step of the altar. And as her eyes rested on the Holy Grail, lo, a bright shaft of light shot into the Cup, while from the dome above there descended a snow-white dove. Over the head of Parsifal it hovered, spreading wide its white wings as if in blessing.

"Oh that I had wings like a dove!" sighed Kundry. "To flee away—to be at rest!"

Heavenly music filled the air.

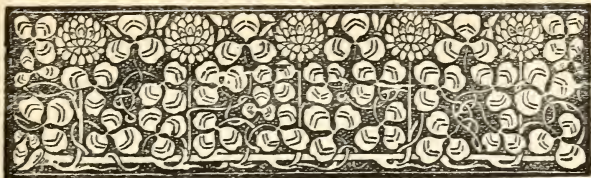
The Cup glowed with a deeper and deeper lustre.

Kundry, gazing on it, felt her soul glow and expand with a new-born heavenly joy. It seemed to her that until that moment she had never truly lived.

And, as Kundry continued to look on the Holy Grail, a wonderful thing happened. Gently, slowly her spirit was drawn out of the tired body. Upwards, upwards, above the altar, above the Grail, above the temple dome,—till, happy and free from earth at last, she soared away, out into the new life beyond.

II

HANS SACHS



HANS SACHS



CHAPTER I



IN the good old days, before railways, factory chimneys, and wise men's books had darkened the fair face of the earth, there lived a shoemaker.

Hans Sachs was his name, and he dwelt in the old German town of Nuremberg. He has been dead full three hundred years, but to this day you may hear the people of

Nuremberg talking of their dear Hans Sachs, and quoting his words, just as though he had only put on his wings yesterday morning.

And you may still see the little parlour where Hans used to sit of an evening, drinking a glass of harmless German beer with a friend, singing wonderful old German songs, and making all the company laugh with his funny jokes.

Hans Sachs was a shoemaker, and he was very proud of the fact. From his prentice days he determined to be one of the best in the town ; and his work was so honest, his stitches so strong, that in due time he became a master-shoemaker of Nuremberg. Now no town could boast such shoemakers as Nuremberg, so it followed of course there was not a man in all Germany who could excel Sachs in the making of shoes ; whether they were for noble knights equipped for the fight, or dainty dames decked-out for the court.

But, besides shoes, Hans Sachs could make songs. He made them, as he did the shoes, of the very best quality, and he became in consequence a Master-singer as well as master-shoemaker of his native town. He wrote the tunes as well as the words, and every Nuremberger loved the songs of Hans Sachs.

His shoes are all worn out and done with long ago, but his songs and proverbs are written in the hearts of the German people, and will never wear out or be forgotten.

When a very small boy, Hans Sachs was sent by his father to the town school, where sons of nobles and burghers alike were educated.

It was a first-class school for hard learning, and dull boys and lazy boys had no easy time there. But Hans was neither dull nor lazy. He enjoyed both work and play, and his temper was bright and generous as the morning sun.

Everyone loved him, from the school-porter's snappy little dog to the crankiest old dominie.

Hans learnt Latin and Greek, besides many other delightful things, and gradually worked his way up till, at fifteen years old, he was the first boy in the school. Then his father took him away and apprenticed him to a shoemaker in the town.

"My son," said old Sachs, "thou hast had time for sowing the seed: it is well now to let it spring and bear fruit. Thou shalt labour at some honest trade."

"Then a shoemaker let me be!" answered Hans.

"Well spoken! There is no trade finer, son Hans."

Old Sachs was himself a shoemaker !

So Hans was apprenticed to a man with a flourishing trade, and his new master kept him hard at work.

He was a gentleman with a hooked nose and a keen eye to business. But Hans worked well, and it was not long before he had learnt to know the art of making shoes in all its branches. At the end of two years there was not a prentice in the whole town who could beat him at a shoe competition.

It was a rare event for Hans to get a holiday. But it happened now and then, when work was slack or all the town kept feast day.

Then Hans, after he had first seen his mother, would love to steal off to a queer little three-cornered house, which leant over the yellow river, and had a roof so high there were no less than six storeys in it. Hans would climb and climb up the rickety winding stair, feeling he must surely come out at last among the stars.

But, once at the top, it was worth anything to look down on all the red roofs of Nuremberg, and see the river gliding below like a shining snake.

In this house dwelt Nunnenbeck the weaver.

He and Hans were the greatest of friends. His old face would light up with pleasure as he heard the boy's quick step outside his door.

Nunnenbeck was a great singer.

No rule had ever been made for music and singing that he did not understand. He belonged to the Worshipful Guild of Master-singers; and when he gave his opinion at their meetings and councils, all the other members listened with respect.

Nunnenbeck thought very highly of Hans.

"Mark my words," he would say, "that boy will one day be a glory to our Nuremberg. The lad is full of music and poetry down to his very finger-tips!"

So it came about that the far-seeing old weaver himself undertook to teach Hans the art of the Master-singer.

They both enjoyed those lessons, though Nunnenbeck was anything but a patient teacher. Many a time did his pipe or book fly at the luckless head of his pupil.

But with this stern old teacher Hans learnt to know all the famous poets and minstrels of Germany, and he sang their songs by heart as he stitched away at his shoes.

Sometimes he made songs of his own. These he would sing to his mother, but not to Nunnenbeck, unless he felt sure they were very fine; and he seldom felt this about his own work.

For seven long years Hans served his apprenticeship as shoemaker.

At last came a day, a joyful day, when his father said—

“Now Hans, my son, thou hast finished the prenticeship bravely! As a reward thou shalt go and travel—see new cities and people!”

Hans gave a shout of delight.

“Hurrah for the best father in Nuremberg!” he cried, tossing his cap high in the air.

“The world is wide—there are many cities, many countries—where wilt thou go?” asked old Sachs, with a smile.

“First I will go to all the most famous singing-schools!” cried Hans eagerly. “To Lubeck, to Hamburg, to Dresden; then south to Vienna, where they say is a school of great renown.”

“Bravo! and then to Italy, and so on to the North Pole, I suppose!” laughed his father. “Well, well, thy mother and I have decided to spare thee two whole years to go on thy travels, and we have put in this strong leather purse something that

may be useful. So make thee ready, and start when thou wilt."

Hans made himself a famous strong pair of boots. He sang so lustily while he worked that he declared, "These boots must be full of music, and will surely sing-out as I walk along."

His packing was soon done; and, having bade farewell to his parents, Hans started off on his travels with a light heart, a knapsack on his back, and a well-filled leather purse in his pocket.



CHAPTER II



O tell all the adventures which befell Hans Sachs would fill many books.

Even to write down all the cities he visited would require a whole chapter.

But at the end of two long years Hans returned home one frosty winter's evening, safe and sound.

His mother said he had grown; his father declared he had improved. But to this the mother would not agree.

"My Hans was always perfect," she said.

He brought home many treasures. Never did one single knapsack hold so much before.

"But the greatest treasure is still to come," said Hans.

"Extravagant rascal! Where is it, then? and what is it?" asked his father.

"No knapsack could contain it, and the value of it is beyond the finest jewel in the emperor's crown!" answered Hans warmly.

"Thunder and lightning! Of what is the boy raving?" laughed old Sachs.

But his mother said—

"What is the maiden's name, and where dwells she, my son?"

"Her name is Kunigunda, little mother. Her eyes are like the blue forget-me-not; her hair like the ripe corn; and her heart—ah, her heart!—is a priceless pearl!" answered Hans.

"And thou art the happy diver who hast secured this pearl! Where didst find it, then, thou rogue?" asked his father.

"She dwells in Ratisbon—a fine old city of great repute; and her father has promised that when the last grapes are gathered in the autumn, I may return and claim my bride. Ah little mother, thou wilt love my Kunigunda even as thou lovest me!" said Hans, as he stooped and kissed his mother's silver hair.

"She shall be my daughter, and I will love her well, for thy sake, my son."

But the mother sighed gently to herself.

Hans let no grass grow under his feet that winter. He started as a shoemaker on his own account, and his good work soon brought him plenty of customers.

Besides this, a great honour was conferred upon him by his native town. He was elected a Master-singer of Nuremberg. Two years of study in the famous singing-schools of Germany had made him a member the guild were proud to admit.

It was old Nunnenbeck who proposed the election, and proud indeed he felt as Hans stood up before all the solemn masters and sang his trial-song.

"The lad has followed well my instructions," he said to himself.

That same evening the old weaver, Hans, and a few chosen comrades met in their favourite little parlour, over a big tankard of foaming beer.

"Here's to the health of the new Master-singer—Hans Sachs, poet, singer, and shoemaker! Long may he flourish!" shouted Nunnenbeck.

"You did bravely to-day there's no denying!" cried one.

"Methinks," said another, "that love-song of thine came straight from the heart!" And he looked very knowingly at his neighbour.

Hans laughed.

"Well, I'll not deny it did come from my heart; though at first the solemn row of masters, and the marker in his black box, nearly drove the sweet face of my blue-eyed Kunigunda out of my head."

"Tell us all about thy sweetheart, Hans!" they cried in chorus.

But Hans shook his head; and all he would say was, "Wait, and some day you shall see."

Spring and summer passed all too slowly for Hans. At length, when the corn began to turn a golden hue and the grapes took on a deeper bloom, he could contain his impatience no longer.

While the first grapes were ripening in the vineyards round Ratisbon, Hans entered the old city, and sped joyfully up the narrow street. He knew that Kunigunda would forgive him, though he came nearly a month before his time.

There was a grand wedding in the old cathedral, and many tears and many blessings followed Kunigunda when she left her home.

She herself could only weep happy tears, like April showers through which the sun will shine.

For had she not Hans! Hans, who was all the world to her, and had been so ever since that summer night when he sang a serenade under her window, while the moon looked on and smiled.

His deep, tender voice had stirred her heart, more even than the cathedral organ on feast days. And during his absence Kunigunda had longed for the sound of that voice, as the thirsty meadow longs for rain.

Hans and his bride lived in Nuremberg. Their home was a quaint old gabled house with a high red roof.

Outside the workshop window grew an elder-tree.

Hans and Kunigunda loved this tree. Hans declared the strong, sweet scent of its white blossoms filled his mind with new and wonderful thoughts.

Kunigunda said no tree in the town gave such a grateful shade from the hot sun, and no berries made such elder-wine.

The years flew happily past.

Children's voices rang in the old red-roofed house, and tiny hands clutched eagerly at the elder-tree's white blossoms and dark purple berries.

Year by year Hans Sachs grew in the honour and esteem of his fellow-citizens. Whether he was the greater as shoemaker or singer they hardly knew.

Hans himself loved to combine his art and his craft on all occasions. He never sent off a pair of shoes without writing on the sole a verse or proverb suitable to the owner. And he always signed his poems with both his name and trade—"Hans Sachs, shoemaker."

Sachs was the most happy and prosperous of men till one sad year, long remembered in Nuremberg, when a dreadful sickness broke out in the city. It spread from house to house, from street to street, like a raging fire before the wind.

The gates of the city were closed. No one might pass either in or out without special permission.

The priests and sisters of mercy hurried to and fro among the poor, stricken people.

The market-place, generally the brightest, busiest spot in all the town, stood silent and deserted.

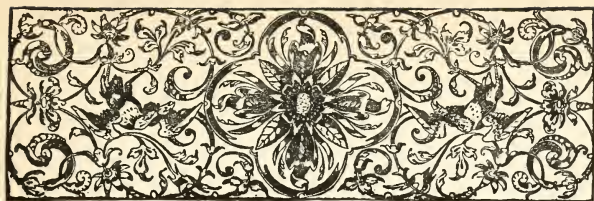
No merry parties rowed up and down the river.

The elder-tree at the corner house hung down its tempting clusters of purple berries, but no tiny hands clutched at them. No children's laughing voices pealed now through the old house.

All was silent and deserted, save for a sad

lonely man who paced to and fro in the desolate home, or sat at the workshop window gazing up to the starry sky.

Hour after hour the old clock would strike unheeded as Hans sat there, thinking of the wife and children who had gone; till at length tears blinded him, and the stars seemed to melt into each other and become a great field of light, in which he fancied he could dimly see angel forms moving to and fro.



CHAPTER III



ONE day Hans Sachs was at his workman's bench, trying to finish a long-promised order.

Suddenly he heard a quick pattering step outside, and then a low knock at his door.

Hans started. It was so like the well-known knock of a little hand which had lain white and still as he placed in it a bunch of elder-blossom for the last time, only a few weeks ago.

Again he heard the knock ; louder this time.

"Come in," said Hans.

And in walked a little girl with bright yellow curls all over her head, and laughing blue eyes. In her arms she carried a doll. Its head was

cracked open at the back, so that you could see inside how the eyes were put in.

"Oh, Master Hans!" she cried, "I have brought you my poor Lisa. They are so cross and stupid at home, they would not let me come here. But I have waited and waited till no one watched, and then I ran here, oh so fast! For I promised poor Lisa I would bring her to Doctor Hans, who is so clever he can mend everything. And here she is."

"Poor Lisa. Let me look at her," said Hans, with a kindly smile.

This was the first of many visits from Sachs' little neighbour Eva.

Her father, Master Pagner the goldsmith, lived in the big house just opposite, and from her nursery window, Eva could just see Hans as he sat at his bench.

"Good-day, friend Hans," her shrill little voice would pipe out, and shortly after a curly head was sure to appear round the corner of the workshop.

These two became fast friends.

Lisa was not the only one of Eva's large family who owed her complete recovery to the wonderful skill of Doctor Hans.

Eva had a splendid house of her very own in the corner of the nursery upstairs. It was a red

house with seven storeys and a high roof, like the other grand houses of Nuremberg. There was a kitchen with a real stove, and real saucepans and kettles. In this house dwelt a family of twelve dolls, some of them great invalids. Hans Sachs gradually became not only doctor, but carpenter, shoemaker, legal adviser, and godfather to the whole household. It was only natural that Eva had often to run over to the corner house on important business, and both her nurse and father ceased to scold her for worrying Master Sachs when they saw how he brightened up at the sight of his small visitor. That sunny head seemed to Hans to bring a ray of light when it entered the lonely room.

As Eva grew older, Hans Sachs taught her something of his own beloved art. She had a sweet voice, and Hans delighted in hearing her sing about his deserted house. He taught her both music and poetry, and she learnt eagerly. Often she would bring her spinning-wheel and set it purring softly, while Sachs, at his work, sang to her from his store of German lore.

Those old German masters! Eva grew to love them almost as well as Hans Sachs himself. But still, in her heart of hearts, she always thought

Hans the greatest master of all. And no doubt she was right.

Each year as it flew by, Sachs had to make Eva's shoes at least one size bigger.

"If it goes on much longer at this rate," he said laughingly one day, "the shoes will be too big to get out of the workshop door."

Nevertheless, it was a very dainty pair of shoes that greeted Eva on her seventeenth birthday as a present "from friend Hans." And it was a tall, slim maiden with a fair, sweet face, who rushed over to the corner house to thank him.

"They are worthy of the Princess Royal; and you must dine with us to-day and drink my health in a bottle of good Rhine wine, friend Hans," she cried; then flew back to make preparations with Magdalena, her maid.

Eva's father, Master Pogner, was a great man now in Nuremberg. To begin with, he held the honoured position of burgher-master. Then he was a goldsmith, and a very rich one, which also earned him much respect. And, besides this, he was a member of the noble Guild of Master-singers, and father of the sweetest maiden in Nuremberg.

Hans Sachs thought more highly of Master

Pogner on account of these two last honours than for all the others put together.

There was a grand feast at the burgher-master's to commemorate his daughter's first grown-up birthday. Master Pogner had invited all his friends, and they vied with each other in making speeches, singing songs, and drinking to the health of their host's fair daughter. Then Eva's father rose to return thanks. He lifted a bumper of sparkling wine, and all the guests clinked glasses together.

Pogner was famous for his speeches. They were very long, and as everybody applauded loudly at the end, he thought they were greatly appreciated.

Generally he had nothing of importance to say. But to-day there was such weight and solemnity in his manner, that all felt something unusual must be coming. After a few words of welcome, he coughed very slowly, paused, drew in a deep breath, and then coughed again. Even Eva, who never listened to any speeches, sat up, alert and attentive.

"Every true-hearted German loves the art of the Fatherland," began Master Pogner; hence, with double fervour does every Master-singer love that art, for does he not love it both as a son of Germany and as a son of art? It is enshrined in

his heart, and before all things else he would promote its honour and glory. I myself," he went on, "have pondered long how best I can further this noble object. I have the honour to be your burgher-master, and as such it is fitting that I should set an example to all good citizens in supporting the art of this country. At last I have made a decision." His eye fell upon Eva, who looked up inquiringly.

Then, raising high his glass, he said slowly—

"I hereby declare that to the Master-singer whose song shall win the votes of the public next St. John's Day, I will give my only child Eva (his eyes filled with tears) as bride, and bequeath to him all my gold and goods besides."

A chorus of voices shouted—

"Here's to the health of Veit Pagner, our noble burgher-master! Long may he live, a true supporter of German art!"

And all the glasses clinked as the company cheered and drank the health of their host.

But Eva did not cheer. She sat quite still, thinking busily. Only it was not easy to think with such a clatter and noise going on.

She looked round the table at the red shining faces and bald shining heads of the portly guests.

A goodly number of the Master-singers were present.

One by one she reviewed them.

Just opposite to her sat Master Zorn—Balthazar Zorn! Eva smiled as she looked at the beaming face which rose above the enormous expanse of flowered waistcoat, and then across to his ample wife and daughter.

Well, she was safe from him at all events.

She quite loved Mistress Zorn for having married Balthazar thirty years ago.

Then came Nicholas Vogel—tall, lanky, and yellow. He had a sick wife and seven children, and never smiled. Thank heaven! he was out of the competition!

Next came August Moser, who drank more beer than any man in Nuremberg. Then Konrad Nachtigal, with a small, sweet voice that seemed to have got into his huge frame by mistake. And Master Kothner, the President of the Singing Guild; and many others. All married — safely married: worthy burghers, and fathers of large families for the most part.

Eva laughed outright, her heart bounding free again as she thought of the Masters who could not sing for the prize.

There were no bachelors!

"Ah, but wait! That stupid, cranky old town-clerk, Beckmesser—I suppose he is a bachelor," said Eva to herself.

She looked down the table to where, at the farther end, two dark dull eyes were fixed on her.

Yes, undoubtedly Beckmesser was a bachelor, and meant to sing for her too, she feared.

"Tiresome old crow! And if there should be no one else to compete with him, why, his croaking will win the day," thought Eva.

"Ah," she murmured, "this will never do; some way out must be found. There is a limit even to one's love of German art."

But aloud this wise maiden only said—

"My honoured guests know well how dear to me is the art of the Fatherland. Proud shall I be if I can do ought to bring it honour."

"Health to our Eva! The maiden speaks wisely and well," cried the men.

But the women whispered—

"She has a proud, determined air, with all her sweet ways, that young girl! She is neither docile nor humble. She will wed whom she chooses, and none other! Let not Veit Pogner deceive himself."



CHAPTER IV



VA sat at her bedroom window, gazing up at the shining worlds overhead and building castles in the air. She had always been a fine architect in that line. A week had passed since the birthday party. In two days' time would be the Feast of St. John.

But Eva had no fear now as to the result of the trial-songs.

No croaking Beckmesser could claim her against her will; for she had made her father promise that her hand should never be given to any man, except with her full consent. And Master Pogner had agreed to this, on condition that Eva promised, on her part, never to marry any but a Master-singer.

Eva was unusually thoughtful. Suddenly she

rose from her seat at the window, and taking a lamp, held it high above her head, so that the light fell full on a picture over the bed.

It was a picture worth looking at, painted by Nuremberg's greatest artist, Master Albrecht Dürer. A youthful manly figure, strong and vigorous. His head thrown back, his eyes raised as though inspired by sweet music from above, while he swept the harp-strings and sang those magic songs which calmed even the troubled spirit of King Saul. Fearless daring and noble dignity were in that fair young face, and the thick golden locks shone like a glory round his head.

"He, too, was 'a Master-singer'!" murmured the girl, as she gazed at the well-loved picture with glowing eyes.

"Ah David, my David—soldier, king, and poet! None but a Master-singer such as thou wert can win my heart!"

She put down the lamp. Could she not see that face even in the dark!

"And to-day I have beheld him," she continued to herself. "Yes, the same noble form and face—the same far-seeing poet's eyes—the self-same curving lips and shining golden hair! Walter! What a lovely name! Better than David, me-



EVA LOOKING AT THE PORTRAIT

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thinks; and more fitting to a knight of noble birth."

Someone knocked softly at the door, and Magdalena entered, holding up a warning finger.

"Oh Mistress Eva, not in bed yet; this is shocking! You will lose all your beauty sleep, and then you will grow old and ugly, and no one will wed you."

"I want no one to wed me, thank you, Lena! There is no married woman as happy as I, Eva the maiden! But don't go, Lena dear," she cried, seizing Magdalena by the arm and making her sit down. "I want so much to talk to you, and I can always talk best when the moon is shining."

Magdalena smiled and sighed.

"Ah child, I spoil you!"

"Now, Lena dear, tell me all about that young knight who came to visit my father to-day. They went off together on business; so I have heard nothing, and am dying of curiosity!"

"And how should I know anything of the young man?" answered Lena.

"O Lena, you are so clever, you always know everything before anyone else. Now, tell me all. Begin with his name. I scarcely heard it as my father presented him."

"His name, I believe, is Heinrich von Stolzing; a knight of noble birth, so they say."

"Not Heinrich—Walter!" corrected Eva. "Now say on. What did he want with my father?"

"He came to sell some estates in the country. He is wishing to settle in Nuremberg and study music. At least so I heard," added Lena. "And, as you know, he brought letters of introduction to Master Pogner. Now I must go, child! I will not be kept talking nonsense with you any longer. Good-night!"

"Good-night, dear sweet Lena. Now I shall sleep in two minutes, and have—oh such happy dreams."

And as Lena closed the door, Eva said to herself—

"A noble knight! did I not feel it in his first glance! A soldier too, and a singer! And he is coming to dwell here in Nuremberg. Ah! this is a beautiful world!"

Eva was soon sound asleep, as she promised.

She dreamt of a noble king called Walter, who came with a sling and stone, threatening to slay any Master-singer who ventured to sing for her at the Feast of St. John. This hero, after many valiant deeds, engaged in single combat with a gigantic

dragon, who had the face of Beckmesser the town-clerk. He soon overthrew this monster, and, placing his foot on his scaly neck, would have cut off his head with a sword had not Hans Sachs interceded. He pleaded for the dragon's life so eloquently that King Walter spared him, merely depriving him of his forked tongue and claws.

The sun was shining full in her face before Eva awoke.

Magdalena shook her, crying—

“Wake up, sleepy-head! This is the Eve of St. John! To-morrow you are to choose a husband. Heaven send you such a suitor as my David.”

David was Hans Sachs' apprentice. His master kept him in good order, otherwise there was not a riot, great or small, in all the town in which David would not have taken part. He and Magdalena had been betrothed since the days when they walked to school together—Lena, a head taller, holding his hand, and defending him from bigger boys and girls, who loved to tease the saucy little David. With Lena he always felt safe. And she was so kind besides! Ever ready to part with her last apple or nut! Most surely she should be rewarded. He would marry her himself when he grew up to

be a fine man. So the betrothal began; and nothing had ever occurred to break it off.

Their relations towards each other were little changed now. It was still Lena to whom David went for comfort when his foolish or mischievous pranks had earned him a good hiding or a supperless bed.

Lena had always some consolation to offer. Her pasties and cakes and home-made wine were the best in the whole town, as David knew full well.

St. Katherine's bell was ringing for service as Eva and Magdalena entered the old church, and walked demurely to the burgher-master's pew.

Eva knelt down; but, for all the crown jewels, she could not have repeated what the good priest said.

Right through the top of her silken hood she could feel two ardent blue eyes.

Sir Walter was there, leaning against a pillar, from where he had a fine view of the burgher-master's pew.

Eva sang the chorale, every word. But her eyes wandered in the direction of a certain ancient stately pillar very often, and very tenderly.

The chorale ended, all the congregation trooped slowly out of church.

Eva and her maid were near the door, when a low voice at her side said earnestly—

“Oh stay ; let me speak but one word with you.”

Eva turned quickly to Magdalena—

“Go please, Lena, and fetch my kerchief—I have left it on the seat.”

Magdalena went off grumbling. Sir Walter continued—

“Forgive me, fairest maiden ; but there is nothing I would not dare only to win one glance from those sweet eyes, one word”—

Here Lena returned with the kerchief. She had found it much too quickly to please her young mistress.

“Here is your kerchief ; and now we must be going home,” she said firmly.

Sir Walter looked in despair ; and Magdalena, having a soft heart, relented.

“Why, how stupid I am !” she exclaimed, “I have forgotten my prayer-book !” And she went off again, granting them two more precious minutes.

Sir Walter begged—

“May I not escort you to your father’s house ? Or is there another who already claims that right ?” he asked, looking anxiously round.

"Only Lena will claim that right to-day," Eva answered, smiling.

"Oh tell me, then!" he implored. "Can you not guess what I fain would know? Is my fate already sealed? Are you betrothed or are you free?"

"I am not betrothed, Sir Knight," she answered demurely. Then, as he exclaimed joyfully, she added, "But neither am I free."

"Oh, do not torture me," he besought; "your answer means life or death to me."

But Magdalena now returned; so the wily knight turned his attention to her, and speedily won her heart by insisting on carrying her prayer-book.

"It is much too heavy for such small hands," he assured her.

Magdalena rewarded him by allowing his escort part of the way; and Sir Walter soon learnt all he wished to know about the Master-singer's competition, at which the fair Eva was to choose her future husband.

"I will gain your hand by sword or song! But for that object I now live, and am ready to die!" he cried with fervour.

And Eva promised that, though all the Master-singers in the world were to sing themselves hoarse

for her, no one save Sir Walter should win her heart and hand.

"Under the linden trees, this evening," whispered Sir Walter, as he kissed her hand at parting.

Magdalena was somewhat shocked at the loving looks and words of her young mistress.

"Why, it was but yesterday," she cried, "that you saw the knight for the first time, Mistress Eva!"

"But have I not possessed his portrait, and loved it, for years?" replied Eva. "Can you not see, Lena, that he is the very image of David?"

"Of David? But are you mad, my child?"

Lena was thinking of her own David, whose red hair and turned-up nose certainly did not resemble those of the knight.

Eva laughed.

"Oh, Lena, how silly you are! Why, of course I mean the beautiful picture in my room. He has the same noble air—the same hair and eyes!"

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed Lena. But whether she saw the likeness will never be known.



CHAPTER V



SIR WALTER presented himself boldly before the worshipful Company of Master-singers as a candidate for the honour of becoming one of their number.

The hall was arranged for the coming trial by the prentices. Seats of honour were prepared for the masters, who were now expected to arrive every minute.

There was the marker's desk, hung round with black curtains to hide him from view.

"That looks dark and foreboding, does it not, Sir Knight?" remarked David. He had undertaken to instruct Sir Walter in all the preparations for the trial.

"That marker," he continued, "is truly an awful terror! There he sits, the curtains drawn closely round him that you may not be disheartened as he marks down every fault, great and small alike, on this big black board. Seven chalk-marks and you are undone. So have a care, Sir Knight!"

"I fear no man! I think but of the prize," said Sir Walter.

"Believe me, then, 'tis not so easy as you seem to think to become a Master-singer. Why, I tell you, Sir Knight, a Master-singer must be perfect poet and perfect musician. Also, having made his song, he must deliver it as perfect singer. Ah!" cried David, in a tone of warning, "'tis a hard thing verily to be Master-singer. Take my advice, Sir Knight, and leave it alone. Why I, who have studied for two whole years as student, cannot yet attain it!"

Sir Walter smiled.

"Never mind, David. I daresay you can make a right good pair of shoes!"

"Well, that I can," answered David proudly; "as even my master, the famous Hans Sachs, will testify, and he is not easy to please. Nothing but the best work goes down with him."

There was a sudden hush amongst the noisy

group of prentices, and the Master-singers entered, taking their places solemnly for the coming trial.

Pogner, the worthy burgher-master, presented the young knight to the assembly, and vouched for his good birth and character.

Master Beckmesser eyed him askance.

Was this young jackanapes going to compete for the prize? *His* prize! He might prove a dangerous rival. Women took such silly fancies, and their taste was so unreliable.

A good-for-nothing young scapegrace," he growled to himself; "leaving his native land and selling his property—all for love of Art, forsooth! So he would make us believe, indeed! Fiddlesticks! say I. Let him go back home." And Beckmesser cast a look of contempt and mistrust on Sir Walter.

"What master taught you your art, Sir Knight?" demanded the president, Kothner.

"When the snow lay deep round my father's old castle, I sat by the hearth and pored all day over an ancient book, till I knew it by heart. That book was by Walter von der Vogelweid," replied Sir Walter.

"A better master could no man have! Our Germany is justly proud of him," cried Hans Sachs.

"Nonsense!" growled Beckmesser; "he has been dead for ages past. How can he teach you our rules?"

The president shook his solemn head.

"Listen, Sir Knight—have you learnt singing in any school or college?"

"Oh yes," laughed Sir Walter gaily; "the forest and the meadow have been my school and college. What I read in the old book in winter, that I heard for myself in the early spring-time, when the birds, the trees, and the frozen brooks burst forth into music.

"Did any sensible man ever listen to such rubbish?" cried Beckmesser in a fury. Oh, the finch and the linnet taught him all in a minute! That is his style of song—*young feather-pate!*"

"Well, well; but there is much to be learnt from Nature," friend Beckmesser, said one master; and Hans Sachs protested—

"What matter, my masters, where the young man was taught, provided only that he has the true art?"

"Are you prepared to sing before us a master-song, entirely original, and correctly composed, Sir Knight?" demanded the president sternly.

"Yes, my masters," answered the knight, his eyes kindling; "for I sing for life's highest prize!"

Then President Kothner took down the table of rules, and read them over in a loud and awful voice, while all the masters sat round in solemn silence.

After this the marker was chosen; and who should be elected but cross-grained Beckmesser.

He pretended to undertake the task very unwillingly. "A sour job, especially to-day," he grumbled; "my chalk will have plenty to do, I expect. Remember, Master Knight, seven faults and you are undone! I shall do my duty, however unpleasant, and my ears are keen."

He entered the marker's box, and the prentices drew the curtains all round him.

"Now begin," said the president.

And Walter sang as he had never sung in his life before. It was a song that brought great shining tears to the eyes of Hans Sachs. For it took him back to the time when, years ago, he had sat on that very stool, and sung his trial-song inspired by love of the sweet Kunigunda.

But in the marker's box loud sounds of disapproval were going on: groans and frequent scratching of the chalk.

As Sir Walter concluded the first verse the black curtains opened suddenly, and the angry face of Beckmesser appeared.

"Have you done at last?" he shouted.

"The most important verse is still to come," answered Sir Walter; "not yet have I sung my lady's praise."

"Well, the slate is full!" cried Beckmesser, holding it up. "Look, my masters! Decide for yourselves whether or no this man is done for! Every law of music is defied—no melody, no grace-notes. A most preposterous song, say I! A hotch-potch of blunders from beginning to end!"

"My masters," pleaded Sir Walter, "will you but allow me to finish the song?"

But by this time there was such a hubbub among the worthy masters that no one could hear his own voice. Beckmesser's black board was being handed from one to the other, and solemn heads were shaking over the record of bad marks.

Hans Sachs alone stood up for the song, and begged that the knight might be allowed to sing it to the end.

"Your rules do not fit this song; you must measure it by others, Master Town-Clerk," he said. "The song is new, I allow, but not confused."

"Listen to friend Sachs," jeered Beckmesser, "how he makes a gap for all fools to creep in and out at pleasure! Shall we allow this, my masters? Is Sachs' word to go against that of the whole guild?"

"The marker should be without prejudice. I fear this one is a rival to the young knight he is judging," said Hans sternly.

"Let Master Sachs mind his own business! Since he has turned poet, see, all of you, in what a sorry plight are my boots and shoes! Look! a great slit here—the sole split there—and my new shoes not sent home yet!"

Beckmesser walked round showing off the holes in his shoes. Hans Sachs laughed good-humouredly. Nothing could ruffle him long; and the town-clerk looked very comical strutting round, his toes turned out like an old jackdaw.

"Ah, forgive me, Master Beckmesser! Your new shoes are almost done. They are but waiting till I can find a motto worthy of him who shall wear them. You know that I inscribe on the shoe of the poorest peasant some suitable lines. How, then, can I send yours without? Let the young man finish his song, and that will no doubt inspire me with some happy thought."

"Well, let us be done with it; let him conclude," said the masters impatiently. They were all put out of tune by the mischievous Beckmesser. And now, while Walter sang the concluding verse, he went round from one to another, grumbling and complaining.

Hans saw there was no hope for his young friend.

Pogner was sorry. He understood little about Walter's song, but he liked his open, fearless face; and he had an idea that his daughter liked it too, and would not care to crown anyone else on St. John's Day.

Sir Walter finished his song. But no one applauded save Hans Sachs: he clapped and praised the song enough for the whole guild.

The other masters muttered together in disapproval, scowled, and shook their heads. When the votes were taken, almost all were against the new candidate.

"Rejected and out-sung," was the masters' verdict.

Walter looked round defiantly.

"Fare ye well, my masters, for ever," he cried, and strode proudly out of the hall.

The meeting then broke up, 'mid much arguing

and disputing. Hans Sachs was the last to leave the hall ; as he did so, he looked sadly at the now vacant chair of the new candidate. " Alas for poor blind human eyes and deaf human ears ! " he sighed. " That rejected singer ought to sit there, crowned as our king ! "



CHAPTER VI



HE moon shone down through the branches of the elder-tree, tipping the leaves with silver.

The elder-blossom sent forth the strong, sweet scent which Hans Sachs loved so well.

Hans was at his window working.

He had sent David, the apprentice, to bed.

On these calm summer nights he loved to be alone. In his ear was ringing still that song of the young knight, Walter von Stolzing.

What a wondrous song it was !

Like the passionate note of the nightingale, fresh and new to the ear, yet to the heart familiar and well-loved.

"Ah," sighed Hans to himself, "no rules could

cage such a song-bird! He is a true poet-singer, whatever the worthy Masters may say."

A shadow fell across the sill.

"Good-evening, Master Sachs," said a low, sweet voice. "Still at work?"

"What! My little Eva still out? Ah, I guess what you have come about—the new shoes!"

Hans knew full well it was nothing of the sort. He guessed she was longing to know how *some-one* had passed the ordeal of the Master-singers.

"Nay, then, you are quite wrong," Eva laughed; "those new shoes are so beautiful, I have not dared to put them on."

"But you will wear them to-morrow as bride?"

"Indeed, friend Hans! And, pray, who then is to be the bridegroom?"

She wondered whether the wise Sachs had guessed all about Sir Walter.

"How can I tell? But all the world says you are to be a bride."

"All the world! Well, friend Sachs, I thought you knew better than to believe 'all the world.'"

"But, indeed, I know nothing."

Hans was in a teasing mood. He stitched away very hard at the shoes he was making.

"For whom are those shoes?—some grandee?"

asked Eva. She hoped they were for Walter, and that Hans might so be made to speak of him.

"Ay, indeed! They are for a proud gentleman who goes a-wooing, and expects, moreover, to carry all before him to-morrow" (Eva's heart beat fast). "These shoes, fair Eva, are for no less a person than" (here Hans paused) "Master Beckmesser!"

"Then put plenty of pitch and wax, that he may stick fast to them and leave me in peace," cried Eva scornfully.

"He hopes by his fine singing to win the prize, you see," continued Hans Sachs.

"What right has he to hope any such thing?"

"Why not, sweet Eva?" answered Hans, with a twinkle in his eye. "You know there are not many bachelors among the Master-singers."

"Dear friend Hans, could not a widower try to win me?" Eva was laughing in her turn.

"Ah, little flatterer, would you try to turn even my old head?"

"Nay, it is you, Master Hans, who are the impostor. This many a year I thought I had your heart. Now I believe you do not care for me at all. You would not mind if this horrid old town-clerk carried me off before your eyes to-morrow!"

"Well, but, sweet child, what could I do, then? It rests with your good father," said Hans in a helpless tone.

He was really very provoking, thought Eva. Nothing would make him talk of her knight. She sighed.

The sigh touched Hans' heart.

"I have been much worried and vexed to-day in the singing-school," he remarked.

"Ah yes; you had a meeting, had you not?" Eva replied eagerly.

"Yes, my child, an election. It gave me a good deal of trouble." And then he told her, while Eva interrupted with many anxious questions, how the young knight had sung, defying all the old time-honoured rules, and so causing a terrible commotion among the Masters.

Hans Sachs did not mention that he had stood loyally by Sir Walter, and done all in his power to help him.

"Is his case, then, quite hopeless? Can he never succeed?" Eva asked, in despairing tones.

"My child, it is hopeless! He who is born a Master has but a bad chance with other Masters."

"But had he no friend among you all?"

Eva's tone was reproachful.

"Friend!" laughed Hans Sachs. "Oh, my young lord was much too proud to want a friend. We all felt very small folk before His High-and-Mightiness, I can tell you! It is better for him to take himself and his new ideas elsewhere, and leave us in peace with our old ones."

"Yes, elsewhere he will shine as he deserves! You are an envious, small-minded set, you Master-singers. And you, Master Sachs, I find, are no better than the rest."

Eva rose hastily and left. Angry tears were in her blue eyes and a great sob in her throat.

She met Lena at the door, coming to fetch her.

Hans Sachs shook his head wisely. He knew all about it. Poor little Eva! She was very angry with him, and no wonder. But, now that he saw exactly how things were, he was going to try and act the part of good fairy-godmother (or fairy-godfather, if there are such beings) to these foolish young lovers. Certainly things looked awry enough just now. Nothing but a fairy's wand or a poet's brain could put all straight.

"Only fancy, Mistress Eva! Master Beckmesser is going to sing you a serenade to-night," said Lena, "if you will but stand at your window! It

is the song by which he hopes to win you to-morrow."

"He may save himself the trouble," answered Eva, looking anxiously down the street. She wondered where her knight could be. Had he not promised faithfully to come and tell her about the trial-song?

"Well, what is to be done with this Beckmesser?" inquired Lena.

"You can stand at the window for me," said Eva carelessly.

"A good idea! How jealous my David will be! What fun!" Lena was delighted. "Now, come indoors," she said; "it is getting very late."

But Eva had caught sight of a figure in the distance, and Lena's advice came too late. Yes! it was he at last!

Lena retired discreetly, only remarking—

"You must not remain more than two minutes, Mistress Eva, or your father will be asking for you; then there will be a nice fuss, and my poor head will be snapt off!"

Two minutes or two hours—neither Eva nor Walter could have measured the difference. Time did not exist for them as they walked together under the shadow of the linden trees.

No one before had ever loved as they did.

All the world was against them; but what did that matter! They would defy the world. Ay, if needs be, Father Pagner, the Master-singers—everyone.

They would run away together that very night; for if they waited till to-morrow, it might be too late.

Sir Walter had arranged everything. Servants and horses were waiting outside the city gates.

If only the moon would not shine so brightly! And if only they could steal down the street unnoticed.

Suddenly a loud blast rent the air.

Both started, and Sir Walter grasped his sword, ready for action.

"It is only the night-watchman with his cow-horn, my beloved," said Eva soothingly. "Come back in the shadow; he must not see us."

"Ten o'clock, good people all;
Put out your fire and eke your light,
That none may come to harm this night.
Praise the Lord of Heaven!"

rang out the hoarse voice of the night-watchman And again came a sturdy blast from his resounding cow-horn. He passed close by the lindens which shaded Eva and her knight, but did not see them

Hans Sachs, behind his window-shutter, had overheard the plan for running away that night.

"A foolish, featherpated idea," muttered Hans to himself. "Lucky for them that old Sachs is here to prevent it. No, no, my fine song-bird, we must contrive something better for my little Eva than a silly, runaway marriage."

Walter and Eva looked cautiously down the street. Not a sound. Not a soul to be seen.

"Now is our time, sweetheart," said Walter.

But just at that moment Hans Sachs opened wide his door, fixing above it a lamp which sent a bright light straight across the street.

No one could pass without his seeing them, that was certain.

Whilst they were considering what to do, the sound of a lute made both start.

"Oh dear, here is another to spoil our plan," cried Eva in despair.

"Why, it is some wretched musician! What can he want at this hour of the night," cried Walter indignantly,

"It is Beckmesser!" groaned Eva.

It was indeed the town-clerk. With eager eyes he gazed up at Eva's window, tuning his lute nervously. Outside Sachs' door was a stone seat:

here Beckmesser placed himself, thinking it a fine position to take up for his serenade.

With the first twang of the lute, out came Hans Sachs. He dragged with him his workman's bench, and, sitting down, proceeded to hammer vigorously on the last, singing lustily at the same time.

"That atrocious, vulgar cobbler!" cried Beckmesser; then furiously to Hans—

"Really, Mr. Cobbler, you seem to have mistaken night for day! Suppose you keep that singing and hammering of yours till to-morrow morning?"

Eva and Walter laughed from their hiding-place under the trees.

"Nay, nay, Mr. Town-Clerk; you remember how you reproached me, before the whole guild to-day, for not finishing your shoes? You see how hard I am working. They shall be done this very night." And Sachs set to work with redoubled vigour.

The window above opened softly.

Eva could just distinguish Lena's laughing face, her own kerchief thrown over her head.

"Heavens! it is my love!" cried Beckmesser, enchanted. "I must appease this horrid cobbler. See here, Friend Sachs," he continued, in a milder tone, "it really does not matter so much about those

shoes of mine. In truth, I had forgotten about them myself. Leave them for the present. I want your valuable opinion about this little song of mine,—my prize-song for to-morrow,—your taste is so excellent.”

Hans laughed in his sleeve. He continued to tease and worry the poor town-clerk to the verge of despair. At last, after much beseeching and threatening from the distracted Beckmesser, Sachs said reluctantly—

“Well, since I desire to learn the difficult art of ‘marker,’ I will listen to your song, and ‘mark’ whenever I detect an error. So, sing away.”

“Yes, friend Sachs, you shall mark with your chalk every time I make a fault. Agreed!”

“Nay, nay, I shall mark with my hammer,” said Hans doggedly.

“Confound the malicious rascal,” muttered Beckmesser; but it was getting late, and he dared not stop to argue the point lest the window above should close. Again he tuned up his lute, and began the famous serenade which was to do such great things on the morrow.

It was an odd, jiggetty little song, which halted and jerked along like Beckmesser himself.

Before he had sung two lines, thud! went Sachs’



BECKMESSER'S SERENADE

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hammer. And at the end of the fourth line came another thud—louder still.

Beckmesser turned round furiously.

“Are you making a joke of this matter, Master Sachs? Dare you to say there was any fault?”

“Words and tune did not fit. I must do my duty, however unpleasant!”

Hans had a wicked twinkle in his eye. “But sing away, Mr. Town-Clerk.”

And poor Beckmesser was fain to sing, lest the window should shut and that adorable head disappear. But he sang with desperation, twanging viciously at the lute under his arm. How it would have rejoiced his soul to get Sachs’ head in that position, and pull out tufts of his hair in time to the song!

Meanwhile David, the apprentice, was sleeping peacefully in his little chamber over the workshop. The window looked out on Master Pagner’s big red house.

Presently David started in his sleep. He sat up and listened. What was that sound? Music! voices! in the middle of the night! (In those good old days, people went to bed at sensible hours.) David jumped up and threw open the window.

Was it possible! There was the town-clerk

singing away below. And, oh heavens ! Who was that listening with beaming face at the window above ! Could he believe his eyes !

The moon shone down too clearly to admit of any mistake. It was Lena !—his Lena !

“Zounds and fury ! I will break every bone in his crooked old body, and smash his ugly old head for him !” cried David.

He dressed in the twinkling of an eye, armed himself with a most ill-looking cudgel, and tore downstairs.

A woeful howl resounded through the street, followed by a shriek of “murder,” “help,” from the open window.

Then came more howls, and a desperate scuffle on the ground, while the voice of Beckmesser gasped out—

“Let me go, you ruffian ! Let me go, I say !”

“Not till I have smashed you up properly !” shouted David, pounding away with his cudgel.

By this time heads were appearing at every window within sight ; and before one had time to turn round, the street was full of an eager crowd of prentices and journeymen, all ready for the fray.

Such a yelling and howling was never heard.

Heads were smashed, noses broken, and arms and legs were flying through the air.

The women leant from the upper windows, shrieking in chorus, "thieves," "murder," "robbery," "saints defend us!"

Eva clung to Walter. They were sheltered by the trees, and watched the riot with anxiety.

"Now is our time," whispered Walter; "with my trusty sword I will cut our way through the mob. Leave yourself to me, beloved."

Encircling Eva with his arm, and brandishing his sword, he advanced towards the crowd.

But before he knew how it happened, Walter found himself seized from behind, pushed violently into Sachs' workshop, and the door bolted and barred by the same prompt hand.

Eva was in the same instant dragged up the steps of her father's house by a weird-looking figure in nightcap and gown, while the voice of the burgher-master himself exclaimed—

"Why, Lena, what in the name of folly are *you* doing out here? Go in at once!"

Lucky it was for Eva that she and Lena had changed kerchiefs and cloaks, and were so mistaken for one another.

A loud blast came ringing down the street.

Above the deafening uproar it pealed like a note of doom.

The crowd were struck with sudden terror.

In panic they fled, hither and thither.

By the time the sturdy watchman reached the scene of battle, not a soul remained; not a sound was to be heard.

He rubbed his eyes, staring about him in surprise.

"Methought I heard the sound of many voices," he said to himself; "doubtless I was mistaken. At least they were not of this earth," he added, crossing himself with a shudder.

Somewhat tremulously he blew another blast from his cow-horn, and sang out—

"Eleven o'clock, good people all!
Beware of spectre, ghost, or sprite,
That none of these your soul affright.
Praise the Lord of Heaven!"

He trembled as he glanced towards the dark shadows of the trees. Then, crossing himself again, passed quickly down the next street.

The great calm face of the moon looked down from out the still depths of the summer sky. She could have explained a good deal to the poor frightened watchman had she chosen. But she did not choose.



CHAPTER VII



It was St. John's Day.

The sun arose in all his glory, flooding with light and warmth the little workshop where Hans Sachs sat, lost in thought over a big folio on his knee.

A bird in the elder-tree burst into a joyful morning song.

Presently David, the apprentice, entered. He was laden with flowers and ribbons, with which to decorate both the workshop and his own person.

St. John's Day was feast and holiday. Through all the town flags were flying and garlands swinging, in honour of the Master-singers' contest.

David wore a meek and subdued air as he glanced towards his master. He could still feel the stinging whack which had forced him to relax his hold on the unlucky town-clerk; not to mention the kick which assisted his speedy ascent to his own chamber.

"The shoes are safely delivered at Master Beckmesser's," he remarked; and then added pleasantly—

"Methought that a famous motto inscribed on the sole!"

Hans Sachs, however, made no reply to these advances. He was absorbed in his book. Suddenly he looked up, perceiving David. Crash went the folio to the ground, causing David's heart to jump like a grasshopper.

It was a false alarm, however. The book had but slipt, and Sachs spoke as mildly as though last night's riot had been a dream.

"Go, rascal, deck thyself for the feast. And mind," he added, "that thou disturb not the guest, Sir Walter von Stolzing."

Again Hans fell a thinking and pondering over the old book.

His thoughts were busy. This guest of his, Sir Walter — he must help him to win the victor's

laurel wreath to-day. Not only because his singing deserved reward, but for her sake, his little Eva! Her heart's desire should be brought about if his wise old head could contrive it. But the difficulties were many and great.

"They are all so mad!" sighed Hans to himself. All the world is mad! Ah well, we must see what Old Sachs can weave to turn their madness his own way!"

A step on the stair, the door opened, and Sir Walter entered.

"Good-morning, my knight; I hope you slept well."

"I have had a lovely dream—a most wonderful dream!" replied Walter.

"Have you, indeed! Now, that is a good sign," said Hans cheerfully. "The poet's best ideas ever come to him in dreams. Did this dream inspire you with a song to win the prize to-day?"

"How is it possible to hope any longer, after what happened at the trial?" Walter asked gloomily.

"Now, look here, my young friend," said Hans kindly; "had I not great hopes of your winning the prize to-day, I should have helped you to run off together last night, instead of preventing you,

as I did. So let all ill-will cease. You have to deal with honest men. But the old Masters took fright at that wild song of yours. It was skilful, no doubt; but, for a marriage-song, we must have some more fitting words and tune. Eh, Sir Knight?"

Walter smiled.

"I believe I have found the song!—found it in my dream last night," he said.

"Bravo!" cried Sachs. "Let us hear the dream now, at once. Perhaps it may be made into a real Master-song."

"Walter sang. He poured forth his song like the bird in the elder-tree; and, lest it should prove equally hard to remember, Hans took up pen and paper, and wrote it down. Now and then he paused, to praise or to advise.

"Good! Let us have another verse just similar." Again, when that was done—

"Now we must have an 'after-song,' that the whole may be complete."

So the dream-song was formed into a Master-song, written and rehearsed.

Hans Sachs was delighted. He felt sure this song would win the day.

"Hold fast to the dream, Sir Knight," he said.

"And now, come, let us array ourselves in rich and gay costume, befitting this happy day. Your faithful servant has discovered your resting-place and brought hither your packs."

Hardly had Walter and Sachs left the workshop when a black head peered in at the window.

A moment after the door opened, and in hobbled the town-clerk. He was richly attired, but nevertheless looked most deplorable. On trying to sit down, he groaned and jumped up quickly, rubbing his stiff, bruised limbs.

In despair, he limped up and down.

All at once his eye fell on the piece of paper Sachs had left on the bench.

He took it up inquisitively, read it through, and then burst out wrathfully—

"So! a trial-song by Master Sachs! The deceiving scoundrel! Now I know what he is after!"

"Good-day, Master Town-Clerk." And Hans entered. "Why this early visit? No fault in the shoes, I hope?"

"Confound those shoes," replied Beckmesser; "one can feel the smallest pebble through the thin soles. Ah, Master Sachs, but I know now what your game is!" He shook his fist. "You think to win the rich Pogner's daughter for yourself!

Aha! That is why you tried to get me out of the way. That is why you drowned my lovely serenade with your hideous singing and hammering, and then raised the riot in which I have been so battered and wounded that no doctor can mend me."

"Good friend," interrupted Sachs, "calm yourself. Think any ill you will of me, but at least believe I have no thought of marrying anyone."

"Pack of lies! I know better. Why, I have here the proof." And Beckmesser flourished the paper in his face, crying—

"Is not this your handwriting?"

"Well, what if it is?"

"And is not this a love-song? Or perhaps you will tell me it is a hymn?" Beckmesser asked with a sneer.

Hans Sachs smiled.

"No, it is hardly that."

"Then is it not proved that you are a most consummate rogue?"

"Maybe! But I have not yet taken to pocketing other men's papers. And that you, friend Beckmesser, may not deserve the name of thief, I will give you that song if you like to keep it. There now!" said Sachs generously.

Beckmesser sprang up in joyful surprise.

"You will? You really mean it?" He could hardly believe in such a piece of good luck, and doubted for a moment lest Hans might be playing some trick on him.

"May I use it as my own?" he asked eagerly.

"Just as you please."

"And sing it to-day?"

"If it is not too difficult."

"I do trust he is up to no villainy," muttered Beckmesser to himself. Then, turning to Sachs—

"And will you swear, when you hear this song, my friend, you will not disclose that it was composed by you?"

"I swear it! No one shall ever know the song was by me," answered Sachs. "But now, friend Beckmesser, one word of advice—see that you study this song carefully, and get a good melody to fit the words."

"Friend Sachs! we all know *you* take the palm as poet. But as for tunes and tones, none can beat *me* in that line, you must allow. Now I am off, for there is no time to lose. Good-bye, dear friend! One day we shall see you as marker, never fear! 'Marker Hans Sachs!' How fine it sounds." And off hobbled Beckmesser, highly pleased with himself and all the world.

At Master Pogner's, over the way, all were in a great bustle. The place was strewn with ribbons, flags, and flowers; maids and pages flew hither and thither.

Eva, in her room upstairs, had just received Lena's finishing touch to her festal dress. Arrayed in shimmering white and pearls, she stood now and gazed for a moment at the well-loved picture over her bed.

"My poet-knight," she murmured; "if you do not win me to-day, no one else shall ever do so. I will live and die unwed" (tears filled her blue eyes at the dismal prospect) "if my hands do not crown you as victor this day."

She looked across the street at Sachs' house.

"Ah, dear Hans Sachs," she cried, "you will help us! True and loving friend that you are. —How noble and handsome he looked this morning!" she sighed; but this last remark did not refer to Hans Sachs. Eva had also been one of Sachs' visitors that morning.

It was strange, but she could not get those charming little new shoes to fit comfortably. Perhaps Master Sachs could do something to help. At all events, she would go over and see!

So Master Sachs had examined the shoes most carefully.

"Where does it hurt, my sweet Eva?" he asked.

First Eva thought the toe was too tight, then the heel was too wide, finally it was the ankle that pinched. Never was such a curiously ill-fitting shoe; for though it looked quite perfect, Eva declared that when she tried to walk the shoe seemed fixed to the ground, while if she wished to stand still, the shoe was uneasy till she walked.

Hans was patient as Job. He took off one shoe and was stretching it on the last, when the door opened and who should walk in but Sir Walter, ready dressed for the fête.

Eva had one shoeless foot perched up on a stool, so she could not possibly go away. The consequence was, she had remained.

And for the next half-hour she and Walter had been as happy as though Saint Peter had unlocked the golden gates and let them into Paradise. Then Lena appeared, and brought Eva back to earth by insisting on her returning home at once to finish the festal preparations.

"Eva! Eva! are you not yet ready?" shouted Master Pogner, bustling and panting at the foot of the stair. "The boat is waiting, all gay with

flowers! Here am I also, in full dress, waiting, waiting for nearly two hours."

"I am coming, my father—coming directly! Ah, but you insisted on dressing in all your fine clothes many hours too soon!" laughed Eva. "It takes but half an hour to row slowly down the river to the landing-place."

"Half an hour, indeed! Would you kill the poor rowers outright, then? With such a load as you and Lena and your maidens, too!"

"You do not mention yourself, dear little father! You are so light you weigh nothing at all, I suppose? Well, here I am!" And Eva tripped gaily down the stairs.

Her father looked at her with pride. Just for one brief moment a mist seemed to float before his eyes.

"Ah!" he sighed, "how like her mother!"



CHAPTER VIII



IN the meadow outside the old town, every Nuremberger, old and young, had turned out in holiday costume. The quiet green fields were transformed. On working days they were almost deserted, save for a

few cows who mooned lazily by the banks of the sleepy river. But to-day the river too woke up, and was all alive with gaily-decorated boats, laden with laughing maidens and young men. All the world had turned out to see the grand competition of the Master-singers.

The Goldsmiths' Guild, the Tailors' Guild, the Shoemakers', Tanners', Bakers',—in fact every guild

in the city, were there. They marched up to the meadow in long processions, each waving their banners and singing in praise of their own trade, and how badly the world would fare without them.

But the most important and busy of all were the Master-singers' prentices, with David at their head. Was it not their own fête! And had not they been there on the field since dawn, arranging the singing-stage, putting up poles, banners, and refreshment tents all over the meadow! They each bore a small wand with a bunch of gay ribbons, in virtue of their office, and received the company at the landing-place with great pomp, ordering all to their places.

As for David, he had quite regained his spirits, and was even more pert than usual.

The great desire of his life had most unexpectedly come to pass that very morning.

His master, Hans Sachs, had promoted him from a common prentice to a full-blown journeyman shoemaker!

He had knelt, as did the noble youths who were knighted, and in place of the usual stroke with the sword, Master Sachs had given him a swinging box on the ear, saying—

“Arise, thou rascal, as Journeyman David!”

He could still feel that box on the ear, but oh, how proud it made him! Now he could marry Lena, and they would live happily for ever after.

“Ah, how heavenly it will be,” said David to himself, “to have Lena always there to cook me nice little dishes, and knit my socks, and see that I do not work too hard.”

At the thought of so much happiness, he seized a pretty peasant girl standing near and waltzed off in a frenzy of delight.

A shout rose from the crowd.

“They are coming! Here they are! The Master-singers, President Kothner, Master Beck-messer, our beloved Hans Sachs! see, here he comes!—and now Mistress Eva, the Queen of the day! How sweet and fair she is,” they cried, in chorus, as Eva stepped from the boat and looked round smiling on the cheering people.

David quickly left his dancing, and rushed to the landing-place just in time to give a helping hand to his Lena. He hoped fervently she had not caught sight of his wild dance with the pretty peasant girl.

In stately procession the Master-singers marched

to the grand-stand, where Eva had the place of honour, surrounded by her maidens.

Master Beckmesser was muttering and groaning over a crumpled paper in his hand.

"Well, Mr. Marker, how goes it?" asked Sachs in a mischievous tone.

"The miserable song! Never was anything so tough," sighed the town-clerk.

"Take my advice, friend Beckmesser, give it up."

"Give it up? now that I am sure of winning! Not likely, Master Sachs!"

Then Sachs stood up and announced that the trial-songs would begin.

All the people cheered, and shouted—

"Hail Sachs! Long live Sachs! Nuremberg's dear Hans Sachs!"

"Forward all unmarried Masters who wish to compete," cried the president. "Master Beckmesser, being the oldest, we will commence with you."

The town-clerk was quaking with fear. He could not remember the words of that tough song, though he had been trying to learn them for hours.

Stumbling up to the singer's stand, he nearly fell over. The prentices tittered, and this did not add to poor Beckmesser's peace of mind.

The people whispered—

“Here’s a nice wooer! Look at him, with his yellow old face and his thin, crooked legs!”

“Silence!” proclaimed the stewards.

With a grand bow towards Eva, Beckmesser began.

It was certainly a very odd song, and seemed more like the ravings of a nightmare than a heavenly inspiration. The unhappy town-clerk had not gained much by trying to palm-off another man’s work as his own. The words were altogether too much for his memory, and his brain felt nigh to cracking. Another difficulty was the tune. No amount of twisting and turning would make it fit the words.

To add to his discomfort, there came a sound of whispering and stifled laughter among the people. Every moment it grew louder. Beckmesser felt his face becoming crimson, while cold shudders swept down his back.

The second verse went even worse than the first.

Beckmesser made such a jumble of the words that at last the prentices, people, and even the sober Masters themselves, burst out laughing.

The town-clerk jumped off the stand, and rushed at Hans Sachs, shaking his fist.

"Accursed cobbler, this is all your doing!" Then, turning to the people, he shouted—

"This song is not my own! It was given to me by Sachs! Yes, your precious idol, Hans Sachs; he made this trash."

With these words he rushed away; and no one saw him again that day, or for many a long day after.

Then Sachs, the wily Sachs, turned to the people, who were crying with astonishment—

"That song by Sachs? Impossible!"

"Nay, my friends, that song is not by me," he said. "How Master Beckmesser got hold of it, I leave him to tell you. But that song, when you hear it properly sung, is a much finer thing than your poor old-fashioned friend, Sachs, could compose."

Hans Sachs, like all really great artists, had a very modest opinion of himself.

But the people laughed heartily, thinking Hans was making one of his jokes.

"That song too fine for our Sachs, indeed! Why, Hans," they cried, "what joke is this?"

"No joke, my friends," he answered; "and I will prove to you what I say, if you will but let me present to you the man who really wrote this song.

Just hear him sing it as it should be sung! Come forth, Sir Walter von Stolzing," he cried, "and sing your song!"

Walter made his way through the crowd; and when they saw his frank, manly face and tall, noble figure, they clapped and cheered.

The Masters nudged one another.

"Ah, that Sachs is a sly old fox," they said; "but for this once you shall have your way, friend Hans! Let us hear your famous singer."

Walter mounted the stand. He looked round on the eager upturned faces of the people, on the merry group of laughing prentices, the solemn row of Master-singers. Finally his eyes rested on the fair face of Pogner's daughter, Eva, his love, the prize for whom he was ready to stake his life.

Now or never he must win her.

From this moment Walter forgot the solemn row of Masters. They might have been a row of winter apples for all he cared. He forgot the joking prentices and the dense crowd of people that pressed around. For the time being he even forgot his true friend Sachs. He sang as the nightingale sings in the still wood at midnight: pouring out his passionate song to his love alone.

And the people were hushed as trees when

no wind is stirring. Breathless, enchained, enchanted by the magic power of music, they listened.

The song lifted them up into a wonderful fairy world, where all were young and fair, and Love was the king.

When Walter ceased they dropped to the earth again. A soft sigh swept through the crowd.

"Ah, how true it all is!" they murmured; "we feel it, we live it, as in some lovely dream!"

Eva said nothing; but her eyes were shining with happy tears.

"Bravo!" shouted the Masters, quite carried away in spite of themselves.

"Hail, true singer and poet! Such a song deserves the Master's Prize."

"Give him the prize," cried all the people; "he has won it fairly!"

Then Eva rose, and taking the victor's wreath of laurel and myrtle, she placed it on Walter's brow as he knelt before her. Hand in hand they went to the worthy Pogner, and both knelt to receive his blessing.

Pogner beamed on them like a rising sun, and, turning to Sachs, said—

"Ah, dear old friend, all this happiness we owe

to you." Then he blessed Walter and Eva many times over, and Hans Sachs too, and everybody else, including himself.

"Now, make the victor a member of our noble guild, Master Pogner," cried the Master-singers.

The burgher-master brought forth a golden chain, from which hung three medals bearing the likeness of David the Minstrel-King, their patron saint.

"Nay," cried Walter, pushing the chain from him; "I will try and be a good singer, without being a Master!"

But Sachs took the rejected badge, and putting it round Walter's neck, he said—

"Take it; the prize you have won to-day is also a gift that comes from the Masters. If you would honour your Beloved aright, you must also honour them, and the great art they represent. For, remember, without this same art you could never have won her."

So Walter became a Master-singer after all.

In due time he married the fair Eva, and settled down as a good citizen of Nuremberg.

And he never forgot that all this he owed, and more besides, to his dear old friend the cobbler-poet, Nuremberg's beloved Hans Sachs.

III

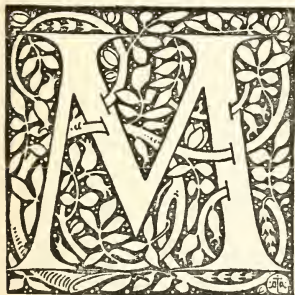
TANNHÄUSER



TANNHÄUSER



CHAPTER I



ANY years ago there lived a noble knight called Tannhäuser. He was famous not only for his courage and success in battle, but for playing the harp, and singing more beautifully than

all the troubadours and minstrels of his day.

The Prince of Thuringia, Landgraf Hermann, was a great patron of musicians and poets. He built a splendid hall in his palace on the Wartburg, and here he would invite all the minstrels to perform before him, and compete for the prize

which was awarded by his niece, the beautiful Princess Elizabeth.

None was so welcome at these feasts of poetry and song as Tannhäuser. It seemed to the princess, when he sang, that all the world was fairer, and heaven nearer. And she loved him for his sweet singing, his noble bearing, and his fair strong face, like a Greek hero of old.

Nothing on earth gave Elizabeth such joy as to crown Tannhäuser King of Song, while all men shouted his praises. The Landgraf Hermann was also wont to declare that no tournament or singing-journey was complete without this noble knight.

Tannhäuser thought of the princess as he thought of the evening star: very fair, and very far above him. He did not often think of her at all; but when he did, he felt only worthy to kneel before her.

Now, it happened one day that Tannhäuser was journeying across the valley of Thuringia, at the foot of the great Hörsel Mountains.

It was evening, and the tinkling chimes of the vesper bell were calling all good people to pray.

A shepherd boy doffed his cap and crossed himself reverently, as the custom was, whispering his evening prayer. But Sir Tannhäuser said no

prayer. His mind was disturbed by grievous, perplexing doubts. He felt no love for Christ or the Holy Virgin, and doubted all the priest said of self-sacrifice and suffering being the nobler way. He thought with longing of the olden times, when men believed in the gods and goddesses, and it seemed to him a glorious thing to worship only beauty, strength, and pleasure.

And as he journeyed the night fell, and the moon arose in such calm splendour that all around was light as day.

Tannhäuser spurred his horse up the mountain slope; when, suddenly, he was aware of something approaching, coming slowly down the winding path through the pine trees. He lifted his eyes, and in the same instant his horse stopped, trembling and shuddering as though in great terror.

Before him stood a woman, so dazzlingly fair, the knight had never before dreamt of such beauty. Her long golden hair fell like a glittering shower about her. Her eyes shone as stars, and seemed to compel whoever gazed into them to do her bidding. She wore a gauzy robe of rosy tint, so fine and delicate that none but fairies could have spun it; while round her waist was a golden belt, studded with strange, sparkling gems.

But the most wonderful thing about this fairest of women was her voice. It was like that magic flute of the Hamelin Piper, which first drew all the rats into the river, and then drew all the children into the mountain-side. No one could resist this voice; but must needs follow, wherever it called.

(Unless, indeed, he were armed with the shield and helmet of the wise Goddess Minerva; which Sir Tannhäuser was not, for he knew nothing about her.)

So, at the first sound of this enchanting voice, Tannhäuser leapt from his horse, and knelt on the ground before the goddess. For she who had appeared to him was none other than the great Goddess Venus.

"Welcome to my kingdom, dear knight," she said; "I knew you would come, for though we have never met, we have long loved each other. Nay! do not worship me—it is your love only I care for. Arise! Look into my eyes, and see your image reflected there, yours only, as it is in my heart also."

She put her soft fingers in his, and Tannhäuser arose, clasping tightly the hand whose touch sent a thrill of new life through him. And as he gazed into the blue depths of those wondrous eyes, he felt he would follow her gladly, even if it were right



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across the world. Then he answered, in a voice that sounded strange and harsh in his own ears—

“O Queen of Love, I am yours for ever! Let me but worship you, serve you, adore you! From henceforth to none other will I sing. My harp shall be dedicated to your praise. Let me but live in the light of those eyes.”

“Dear knight,” she replied, “the boon I would crave is, that for love of me you would grace my weary home this night. For know that my throne has been usurped, my fickle worshippers have left me, and men have banished me to this dark mountain, inside which, however, I still hold my court. And I will do all I can to make my honoured guest welcome and happy, will he but follow me.”

“Follow you!” exclaimed Tannhäuser in reckless, passionate tones; “I will follow you to the world’s end! I will follow you till death!” He caught both her hands in his and pressed them to his lips.

“Come, then,” said Venus, with a sweet, low laugh. And taking him by the hand, she guided him swiftly up through the pine trees. They came at length to a cave; the entrance was half-hidden by ferns and flowering shrubs. As they pushed these aside and entered, faint sounds of mysterious music

were wafted towards them from below. The cave was filled with an odour of spices and roses, and ended in a long winding passage, leading to a spiral flight of stairs.

Venus paused as they entered the cave, and taking a long mesh of her siken hair, she bound it round and round Tannhäuser's head and over his eyes, saying—

“Love, you know, must be blind, my knight.”

And Tannhäuser would have been content to remain thus blinded for ever, with that sweet voice near him whispering “my knight.”

Then, hand in hand, they descended rapidly into the very bowels of the earth; Tannhäuser's feet scarcely touching the stair, but his hand holding tightly that of his fair guide.

Down, down they went; the cold air rushed around them. Tannhäuser began to feel dazed and giddy.

Suddenly they stopped. The air became warm and balmy, while soft sounds of music and singing floated towards them. The goddess unwound the golden bandage of her hair. Tannhäuser looked round and found himself in a vast palace, formed out of a spacious grotto.

Down one side dashed a lovely waterfall. In

the distance was a cool green lake in which naiads were bathing and sporting, while sirens and other fair water-creatures reclined on the banks.

There were flowers of rarest scent and colour, more wonderful than ever grew on the face of this earth ; and, under the drooping leaves of large green ferns, Tannhäuser perceived some tiny cupids fast asleep, their wings folded, like little birds.

On every side there was some new wonder, and all the place rang with laughter and singing.

Venus led Tannhäuser to an exquisite couch, carved out of mother-of-pearl, in the form of a great sea-shell, and here he flung himself down at her feet.

Music from a thousand invisible harps played softly round them, and fairy-like nymphs and graces gathered from all sides to adore their Queen.

Presently, at a sign from Venus, there was a rustle among the fern leaves, and up sprang the winged cupids.

They flew off, returning soon with goblets of sparkling wine, such as only the gods and goddesses drink ; and the nymphs, meanwhile, presented delicious fruits and viands on dishes of gold and crystal.

Then the cupids floated above the couch and fanned Venus and Tannhäuser with their tiny wings, and playfully shot at them with their small bows and arrows.

Presently from above descended a rosy cloud, fine as a gossamer veil. Down, down it came, floating over the sea-shell couch, and wrapt them round, those two, while cupids, nymphs, and graces faded away gradually into the far distance.

And from that hour Tannhäuser forgot all else in life save Venus alone. He lived but for her, and sang only songs in her praise.

He forgot that he had ever wielded a sword as a brave soldier and knight.

He forgot his king and his country, and he never once thought of the sweet Princess Elizabeth.

Day after day passed by; Tannhäuser knew not how quickly, for down in the Grotto of Venus there was neither sun nor moon to rise or set.

And every hour the lovely goddess prepared for him some new delight. There was no desire, no dream, however extravagant, that could not be satisfied in this abode of magic.

Sometimes Tannhäuser would join in the

maddest revels, out-doing those feasts that Bacchus, the old wine-god, held in former times.

Sometimes he would dream away long hours, reclining with Venus on a bank of blue asphodels, while soft alluring voices sang, and fairy nymphs fanned them with their long, pointed wings.

Never did a passing thought come to Tannhäuser of his bygone life, for Venus by her magic arts caused him to forget all save herself. If for a moment he wearied of any pastime or pleasure, the fair goddess instantly ordered some new diversion, or, softly caressing him, besought with her bewitching smile, "Sing to me, sweet love! There is nought on earth or in heaven can fill my soul with such rapture as your beloved voice."

Then Tannhäuser would take up his lyre, and sing; and the thought that he was loved by the Queen of Love herself made him feel equal to the gods.

So time rolled on, and Tannhäuser heeded not, nor knew, that summer had changed to winter, and winter again to spring full many a time since that fateful evening when he climbed the Hörsel Cliffs.

Now it happened one day that Tannhäuser had thrown himself down on the bank of the cool lake

at the feet of Venus. He was weary even of enjoyment, as will happen after too long a holiday and no work to do.

He fell asleep and dreamed ; and in his dream he heard, as distinctly as in waking life, the sweet, clear call of the church bells, chiming and calling, just as he had heard them in his boyhood, just as he had heard them that evening long ago, when he rode across the Hörsel Meadows. They rang out so clear and distinct at last, that he awoke with a start.

Venus laid her soft hand on his head soothingly, and asked—

“Beloved, of what were you dreaming? What troubled your slumber?”

“Oh, I heard in my dream the sweet bells calling,” answered Tannhäuser, “those bells that I have not heard for so long! How long is it, I wonder?” For the first time it struck him that many days must have flown silently by while he dwelt in the mountain grotto.

Venus read his thought, and shuddered lest this dream should disturb their pleasant life. She twined her fingers gently in his hair.

“Where are you wandering, my knight, away from your own true love?” she said.

But Tannhäuser was not to be soothed so easily. The bells had roused him, calling on his very soul to awake before it was too late.

“How long have I been here?” he cried. “Days, months must have passed away! I never see the sun or the stars. I never hear the nightingale, to tell me that the spring is come. Shall I never hear it again!” he said in despairing tones.

Venus was alarmed and vexed at these words, but she only sighed softly—

“Ah, what do I hear? Is it possible that you, my beloved, are weary of my love? Weary of happiness such as is given only to the gods? Then, handing him the lyre, “Oh, drive away the dream, and sing to me,” she cried. “Sing to me of love, my minstrel, for is not her highest prize yours?”

So Tannhäuser swept his harp-strings and sang. He praised love and the beautiful goddess above all things else; and it is possible he might have forgotten his dream, but still in his ear the bells rang on and would not be silenced.

“O Goddess, I must arise and go,” he cried. “I must leave you, for this life of ease and pleasure is making me a slave. Your love is too great for a mortal. I am not a god, and too much bliss is

making me less than a man. I must go into the world again—fight, strive, sorrow, and work. Oh, let me go, fair Queen.”

“What are these woeful words I hear? Where is our joy of yesterday? Have I done aught to grieve or vex you, my knight? Oh, speak not of leaving me. Without you there is no happiness for me. In what has my love failed?”

“Your love is like yourself, beyond all praise,” answered Tannhäuser warmly; “but I dare not may not stay here longer, dreaming my life away. I long to feel again the fresh, strong wind of heaven on my brow. I long to hear the free birds singing in the woods, and be as free as they are. And I long to hear again the bells, the sweet church bells!”

At this Venus could contain her wrath no longer. She sprang up, her beautiful face aflame with anger and indignation.

“Woe be to you, faithless one! What treason do I hear. So, you are weary of me! You praise me, indeed, but long to leave me! Away with such praise! Begone, then, if you will; my doors are open to heroes only, not to slaves and beggars. Begone, unworthy one!”

“So be it; I go,” replied Tannhäuser. “Farewell for ever, O Goddess!”

But when he turned to depart, the wrath of Venus melted into sorrow at losing him, and with tears and prayers she besought him not to desert her.

It was a sore trial to resist such supplication from the bewitching goddess, but the echo of the bells rang on persistently in his ear and kept Tannhäuser firm in his purpose.

“I dare not stay, beloved Queen; my soul is asleep in this beguiling home of yours.”

“Ah, cruel and faithless one,” cried Venus in despair; “but, heed me well,” she continued, “the day will surely come when you return as suppliant to me whom you are now so basely deserting. Yes! Once mine, you are mine for ever! You shall find no rest, no peace in the world to which you are returning.”

“Though I go to the grave and death, still I must go,” answered Tannhäuser. “I shall find rest and peace only in repentance; not in thee, O lovely Goddess of Pleasure! My peace, my hope is in the Holy Virgin.”

No sooner had Tannhäuser uttered this name than there was a terrific crash, as though the crack of doom had sounded. In one moment, Venus, her palace, and everything in it had disappeared,

and Tannhäuser found himself suddenly transported to a smiling valley.

The sun was shining gloriously; the sky was blue overhead.

In the distance were the Hørsel Mountains, and not far off rose the palace of the Wartburg.

Sheep bells were tinkling, and a shepherd playing on his pipe, sang merrily that May, the lovely month of May, had come.

But Tannhäuser heeded not his piping and singing. He stood like one spellbound, stunned, gazing upwards.

Presently a troop of men, all clad in dusky brown robes, came slowly down the mountain path, chanting as they marched. They were pilgrims going on a long journey to Rome, to obtain pardon for their sins and a blessing from the Pope.

The shepherd boy called after them—

“Good speed, good speed to Rome. Say a prayer for me also, holy brothers.”

Then Tannhäuser fell down on his knees, clasped his hands, bowed his head low to the ground, and prayed.

He knelt thus for a long time, not noticing that a party of richly-dressed knights had come down from the castle and were approaching him.

They looked at him with curiosity, wondering who this strange man could be. Then one of their number came close up to him, and exclaimed joyfully—

“It is he! Tannhäuser!”

The others crowded round, and the Landgraf Hermann and his knights and minstrels welcomed their long-lost friend heartily back to their midst.

“Why have you been absent so long? Where have you been, Sir Tannhäuser?” asked the Landgraf.

Tannhäuser had no wish to relate his adventures, so he answered—

“I have been in a far-distant country, most noble Prince, but finding neither peace nor satisfaction, I have returned to this much-loved land.”

“That was well done, at least,” cried the Landgraf; “and now we have you once more among us, we shall not allow you to depart again; so make you ready to return with us to the Wartburg.”

But Tannhäuser begged to be excused. He felt in no mood to join his old comrades.

Now, among the minstrels was one who had always been a faithful friend to Tannhäuser. Wolfram was his name, a brave knight and true.

Seeing Tannhäuser determined to depart, he

detained him, saying, in low, earnest tones, "Oh stay, I beg, for the sake of her who has missed you so sorely—the Princess Elizabeth."

At the mention of this name a great change came over Tannhäuser. He paused. How long since he had given one thought to that sweet maid! Yet, deep down in his heart, her image was enshrined. It needed but a word for his slumbering love to awaken.

Then Wolfram told Tannhäuser how the Princess had mourned his departure; how her cheek had grown pale, and she had ceased to care for their Feasts of Song, since his departure. Great joy filled the heart of Tannhäuser at this news. He begged Wolfram to lead him quickly to the sweet Elizabeth, for he greatly longed to see her again. And turning to the Landgraf, he now gratefully accepted his hospitality.



CHAPTER II



IN her tapestried chamber at the Wartburg Castle, the Princess Elizabeth sat working with her maidens. Her heart was heavy and her cheek was pale. She sighed often as she gazed out across the blue hills. Her thoughts were far away, with the noble knight her hands had so often crowned as King of Song in the days gone by.

She had waited so long for his return, that her heart was sick with waiting.

Every morning on awaking, she would look across the valley to the distant mountains, and sigh, "Will he come to-day, I wonder?"

And every evening she gazed with tearful eyes up at the star-lit sky, and sighed again, "Ah me, he will never, never return!"

Her uncle, the Landgraf Hermann, was greatly distressed that his sweet niece no longer sang merrily about the castle, or cared for dancing and hunting. He loved her much, and this helped him to guess what she would never have told him, the cause of her secret sorrow.

On this lovely May day the Princess sat at her window. She heard the clattering of the horses, as her uncle and his knights returned from the hunt. It seemed to her they were talking and laughing more gaily than usual, as though some welcome guest had joined their party. Her heart began to beat, she knew not why.

Suddenly the door opened, and her favourite page rushed in, exclaiming joyfully—

"Oh, Princess! such glad news! The knight Sir Tannhäuser has returned, and it is announced that he will compete in the grand singing-tourney which takes place to-day."

On hearing this news, Elizabeth thought she would have died of sudden joy. But, happily for them, people seldom die of this complaint. So

Elizabeth sprang up, instead, and summoned her waiting-maid.

"Bring hither my festal gown," she cried, "for I will attend the grand tourney this day."

The maid obeyed gladly, wondering at this sudden change and the joyful aspect of her young mistress.

In a gown of purest white, her fair head encircled with a small coronet of gold, Elizabeth looked like a tall white lily, such as the saints bear in their hands.

"My Princess is the fairest in all the land! She is worthy to marry an emperor," the waiting-maid said to herself with pride.

But Elizabeth cared nothing for emperors. She flew down to the hall, where the singing-tourney was to take place. That dear hall she had once loved so well, and which for so long she had shunned. Everything there spoke of her absent knight, and of the happy days gone by: the very walls seemed to echo his loved voice.

But now he had returned, and Elizabeth felt like a spring flower when winter is past. And as she poured out her heart in a song of joy and hope, Tannhäuser himself entered the hall. He had been guided there by his faithful friend Wolfram, who quickly guessed where the Princess would be

found. Wolfram sighed deeply as he left them together. He loved the sweet Elizabeth himself with all his soul, and without hope, knowing well she loved another. Tannhäuser knelt and kissed Elizabeth's hand; his heart too full of joy to speak, and feeling all unworthy before this fair, innocent maiden.

Elizabeth begged him to rise; he who had always been a king and victor in this Hall of Song. Then she told him how sorely she had missed him, and asked where he had tarried so long?

Tannhäuser was ashamed to tell her. It all seemed to have happened years ago. A thick cloud had fallen between to-day and yesterday.

"I have been in a far-distant land," he answered; "so far away, I feared I should never see your sweet face again. It was a miracle brought me back to you."

"Then praised be that miracle!" cried Elizabeth, her blue eyes shining joyously. "The time has past slowly and wearily in your absence—oh so wearily! In music and singing there was no comfort. Nay, strangely enough, it caused me only pain. How may this be, when the sound of your voice in the song could ever stir my heart to mirth and joy?"

"Ah, my sweet Princess," answered Tannhäuser eagerly, "it was because Love moved my voice and touched my strings! *He* spoke to you from out my songs, and he it is that has brought me back to you."

Then they were both as happy as happy could be, and forgot for a short time that sorrow, sin, and death existed in this world; forgot all, save the happy present and their love for each other. But there was one whose memory was not so short-lived. Venus, the offended Queen, could not forget the past so quickly. Being a goddess, she knew by magic all that was taking place, for she had strange powers we know not of. In silent wrath she was biding her time to be revenged on her faithless knight.

Meanwhile, by order of the Landgraf, grand preparations had been made for the singing-tourney; and it was announced that the fair Princess Elizabeth would herself bestow the prize, a laurel wreath, upon the victor.

This laurel wreath was esteemed as highly in those days as golden chains and diamond stars are now.

In due time the guests came driving up to the Wartburg in all their magnificence. Gilded coaches

and outriders, and richly-trapped horses proudly tossing their flowing manes, quite as pleased with their fine feathers as their owners with theirs.

The Landgraf and his niece received the company, giving to all a hearty welcome as they took their places in the Grand Hall.

The trumpets sounded and the minstrels entered, each followed by a page bearing his harp.

Elizabeth's heart beat fast with pride and joy as she saw her beloved knight enter. He looked more noble and handsome, she thought, than the noblest and handsomest there.

Lots were then drawn to decide on the minstrel who should open the tourney. It fell to Wolfram. Taking his harp, he stood forth and sang. His song was of love, and all the time he looked at the Princess and thought of her : his bright star, so far removed, yet so faithfully adored. The Landgraf, guests, and minstrels applauded loudly when the song ended ; all except Tannhäuser. Some strange power seemed suddenly to have possessed him. While Wolfram sang he smiled curiously, as though seeing and hearing magic sights and sounds. When the applause ceased he started up, and, sweeping his lyre, he cried—

“You may be very wise, but you know nothing

about love, friend Wolfram!" Then, in strange wild accents, he sang, "Ah, love is a wonderful thing: but it is for the few, not for the many. The chosen few who, like myself, have known and experienced its magic power! Humbly kneeling and adoring a star out of reach! Ha! ha! that is not love, I tell you!" And Tannhäuser gave a mocking laugh.

Again he saw before him Venus and her grotto. Again he listened to the magic music and alluring voices.

For this was the hour that the wrathful goddess had chosen to cast her spell upon him, and he was bewitched once more.

The company were greatly shocked at his wild look and words.

One of the minstrels, Biterolf by name, rose and reproved him severely. He upheld the sweet song of Wolfram, and strongly condemned Tannhäuser's answer.

Tannhäuser laughed a loud scoffing laugh.

"What do you pretend to know about the matter, surly old wolf? Love is not made for paltry souls such as yours!"

Biterolf was furious at this rude speech. He drew his sword, and the Landgraf had hard work to keep the peace.

The shocked faces of all the noble knights and dames only served to make Tannhäuser worse. At last, in a mad frenzy, he burst into a song of praise to Venus herself, and wound up by telling the horrified assembly—

“Go, see for yourselves what her love is like! Go to the Venus Mountain, where I have been!”

If one of great Jove's biggest thunderbolts had fallen into the midst of that gay company, it could not have caused a more terrific commotion than these words.

The ladies rose up with a cry of dismay and horror; they left the hall, summoned their coaches, and drove away as fast as they could.

The knights and minstrels drew their swords, and were advancing in a body on the guilty knight, when a voice cried, “Hold! stop!”

And Elizabeth, who had become very pale during Tannhäuser's last fearful outburst, rushed between him and the drawn swords of the angry men.

They drew back astonished, and her uncle exclaimed—

“What, Elizabeth! You would uphold such a sinner?”

“Stand back, and sheathe your swords, everyone

of you," said Elizabeth ; "or strike him only through me. Do you think I should feel any wound as I do the one *he* has just given me!"

And standing before them, her pale sweet face full of dignity and courage, Elizabeth pleaded for the unhappy Tannhäuser. She told them that a fearful mighty magic held him, and that only by deep penitence could he ever hope to reach heaven.

"What," she cried, "you dare to judge such an one! You rush to kill him with cruel swords, all his sins unpardoned, while I, whose heart he has broken, pray and plead for him!"

At her earnest words the angry crowd fell back. They sheathed their swords, ashamed before her. Their hearts were touched by her great pity and love.

And Tannhäuser ; what of him ?

At the first words of Elizabeth he had fallen to the ground, overcome by grief and remorse. The terrible bewitchment of Venus was past. The spell was broken.

As Elizabeth finished speaking he raised his head. His face was pale and haggard. No one could have recognised in him the proud knight who marched so triumphantly into the hall one short hour ago. Tannhäuser had faced the angry

knights and their drawn swords with scornful indifference. He laughed at their threats and their wrath. But the voice of Elizabeth, like the sweet church bells of his dream, had recalled him to himself.

Now, overwhelmed with grief and shame, he knelt, and, before them all, thanked God for sending such an angel to save his soul, and prayed he might find mercy for his sin. The Landgraf looked on sternly. He was grievously disappointed in Tannhäuser. But he loved his sweet niece too well to say all he felt.

Presently a solemn chant was heard in the distance. Nearer it came, and nearer.

"It is the song of the pilgrims, on their way to Rome," said the Landgraf. Then, turning to Tannhäuser, "If your repentance is true, go," he cried, "and join those pious brothers on their pilgrimage. Seek pardon from the holy Pope."

Tannhäuser was thankful to show his penitence and gratitude to Elizabeth by taking this advice.

Kneeling low he kissed the hem of her snow-white robe, feeling himself all unworthy to touch her hand. Then, with a look of hope dawning in his unhappy eyes, he hurried after the pilgrims.



CHAPTER III



ON a scorching summer's day a band of pilgrims toiled along the dried-up plain.

Before them rose the long chain of snowy-peaked Alps, which they must cross before

reaching the fair land of Italy.

They were footsore and weary with many days journeying and little food or rest.

But, among them all, none had suffered such hardships as the strange knight who joined them so hurriedly at the last moment of starting.

When others sought their way across the cool green meadow, he chose rather to march along the stony road, taking off his sandals and walking barefoot where the thorns and stones must wound his feet.

When others paused to moisten their parched lips at some wayside fountain, he would leave it untouched and pass by on the other side. Did they pause to gaze at the beauty of some passing scene, he would close his eyes or fix them on his stony path.

And all this Tannhäuser did, in penitence, for the tears of sorrow he had caused Elizabeth to shed.

He was clad in coarsest sackcloth—a rope round his waist, a knotty staff in his hand, and a leaden cross hung round his neck.

But all his bodily sufferings of weariness, hunger, and thirst were as nothing compared to the great weight of grief on his heart. The grief of knowing that his sweet love Elizabeth was sorrowing and breaking her heart for his sins. The white-haired old priest who led the pilgrims was greatly touched by the penitence and self-sacrifice of Tannhäuser. He wondered often who the strange man could be, and what the crime he had committed that called for so much extra penance. But, being a kind, wise old man, who had seen much of life's sorrows, he asked no questions, only spoke kindly with the knight as they journeyed on their way.

Tannhäuser felt grateful for this sympathy, and

told the good old priest something of his story. He did not mention the Venus Mountain ; but he confessed that his only hope lay in obtaining pardon from the Pope for a great sin, and that a holy maiden wept and prayed for him.

The priest promised.

“I will do all in my power to help you, my son. Only continue to hope and pray. When we reach Rome, I will bring you myself into the presence of the Holy Father.” For he had known the Pope, and served him faithfully many years.

The sun went down as the pilgrim band ascended the mountain track. They hoped to rest that night at a little convent on the summit of the Alpine pass. Up, up they toiled ; the narrow path seemed to stretch on endlessly, becoming steeper with every step. But Tannhäuser never flagged ; something from within urged him ever on, and on.

He would help the weary ones who lagged behind, saying, “Take my hand, brother ; I am strong, and can well help you along for a while.”

Higher they mounted, and higher.

They reached the borderland that separates summer from eternal winter. Below stretched the pine woods, and patches of meadow-land dotted

with tiny brown chalets. Before them rose the white peaks and bleak, bare rocks.

On they trudged through the snow, shivering as they went—sick with cold, hunger, and fatigue.

A sigh of relief and hope swept through the weary company when at length they saw the welcome light of the little convent. Good and holy monks dwelt in this lonely spot, and kept their little white house open day and night for the benefit of travellers and pilgrims.

“Welcome, brothers! Peace be with you!” said the monk who opened the door. But as, one by one, they passed in, he began to look dismayed at the sight of so many guests. For the convent was small and the larder not very full. He continued to repeat “welcome, dear brothers,” but each time in a more uncertain tone.

Tannhäuser guessed his difficulty.

“Trouble not for me, holy father,” he said. “I have neither hunger nor thirst. And as for a bed, this soft snow and the wall of your friendly house will rest me right well.”

The monk was greatly relieved at having one less to care for.

“Good-night,” he said; “and peace be with your soul, my son.”

But the old priest came and brought Tannhäuser half his own portion of food, as he lay in the cold outside.

"Take it, I pray you," he said; "else, though there may be 'peace in your soul,' as the good father prayed, there may be none in your starving body."

And when Tannhäuser pushed it gently from him, he insisted, asking—

"Would you go to heaven alone, my son? Will you not allow me also one little act of self-sacrifice?"

Next morning, at break of day, the pilgrims were off on their journey again. Down through the snowfields, glistening like sheets of diamonds in the morning sun; then lower, where the flowers spread like a carpet under their feet, and the butterflies and grasshoppers rose up to greet them.

So they descended into the Italian valley, and Rome seemed many leagues nearer than yesterday. Over the plains again; through the vineyards, where the tiny green grapes were ripening; through the noisy villages, swarming with dirty, merry-eyed children.

On through many a town they passed; till at length, one night, after toiling long through the

darkness down a straight white road, they came to an old archway.

Here the pilgrims paused, and tears fell fast from many eyes as their voices were raised in a quavering song of thanksgiving.

They were come at last to Rome.

Through the narrow winding streets of the sleeping city they walked, like ghosts in the faint moonlight.

They crossed a bridge of stone, and gazed a moment at the yellow river rushing by — the famous Tiber, into which, so many years ago, the brave Horatius Cocles had plunged.

On they marched, past the gigantic walls and ruined arches of the mighty Coliseum.

And many shuddered as they thought of the grim tales those stones could tell, had they a voice. For this was the great arena where the blood of thousands had been shed in the old heathen days. Round those empty walls had once gleamed a ring of eager, cruel faces, their gaze fixed on the circus, where wild beasts fought with some brave Christian, martyred for the faith.

Death and cruelty had then reigned there supreme.

But now the silver moon was shining on a great

stone cross, raised in the midst of the deserted ruins. Tiny ferns and star-like flowers peeped out between the great stone seats ; and Peace reigned there instead.

The old priest conducted his pilgrim band to a quiet monastery for the night. The abbot received them kindly. The city was crowded to overflowing with strangers, he told them, all come up for the great festival which should commence on the morrow.

At early dawn the city awoke, with joyous peals of church bells in every quarter.

The pilgrims rose and joined the monks in the little chapel of the convent, where a service of song and thanksgiving was held.

Tannhäuser's heart beat high with hope and fear. To-day he would know his fate.

The Pope of Rome, before whom even emperors and kings bowed low, was the only person who had the power of pronouncing pardon for a sin so great as Tannhäuser's. Without that pardon the offender must be an outcast for ever, refused admission to the King's Court and to all respectable society.

Tannhäuser had cause for doubt and fear.

It was well known that the Pope and all his cardinals held in special horror the powerful

witching goddess — that fair deceiver who, with her magic arts, bound men, even the wisest and bravest, her slaves and worshippers all their days. Under her sway they grew old, haggard, and wrecked in the prime of manhood. And, worse still, they became neglectful of every duty, and cared nothing for king, country, or even the great Pope of Rome himself.

Still, it was said the Holy Church held out mercy for all sinners who repented; and Tannhäuser prayed as he had never prayed in his life before, while he knelt in the monks' little chapel, that to-day he might obtain the pardon which would restore him to Elizabeth, and bring the happy light again into her dear eyes.

The kind old priest himself guided Tannhäuser to the palace of the Pope, and obtained for him the interview he sought.

On the way, he spoke words of encouragement.

"Fear nothing, my son," he said; "for now you shall see how great is God's mercy and love, as the holy Pope will tell you. He has heard confessed the worst deeds ever man did; so fear not to tell him all."

In a great hall with long galleries sat all the people, waiting till the Pope should appear.

There were cardinals in scarlet and bishops in purple, and a glittering throng in gold and silver embroideries and jewels.

But Tannhäuser did not take his place with these, though once he had walked proudly among the greatest of them.

Now in the background he stood, with a lowly crowd of travel-stained pilgrims, tattered monks, and humble penitents.

Some had come, just to kiss the sacred feet of the Pope. Others, to kneel for his blessing; and many more, like Tannhäuser, to confess their sins and seek his pardon.

Presently there was a stir in the hall. The trumpeters entered, blowing a loud blast on their long silver trumpets. Then followed the mace-bearers with their silver wands. Then the Papal Guard, all picked men of great height and strength, gorgeous in their shining helmets and plumes.

And at last, borne aloft by his chamberlains, surrounded by his priests and pages, swinging censers of incense and waving fans of long white peacock feathers, came the great Pope himself, and was carried to his throne.

All the company, great and small, raised a shout of joy, crying—

“Long live the Pope! Long live our King!”

Then they fell on their faces, and the Pope raised his thin white hands and blessed them.

One by one, the pilgrims passed up the long hall to the foot of the Pope's throne.

Many crawled the whole way, smiting their foreheads to the ground as they went.

All, however,—great sinners and lesser sinners,—obtained pardon and a blessing that happy day.

Tannhäuser waited long, but his turn came at last. He knelt humbly, his pale, haggard face raised beseechingly to that of the stern Pope.

Clasping his thin worn hands tightly together, he made his terrible confession.

“Holy Father! I am Tannhäuser. I have been bound as with burning fetters! I have dwelt in the Venus Mountain. Humbly here I crave mercy and pardon for my sin!”

But at the first mention of the Venus Mountain the Pope started up, grasping his pastoral rod, and whether there was more of horror or of wrath in his face, would be hard to tell.

For one moment there was an awful silence. Then in terrible tones, like the rolling of thunder, came the Pope's answer—

“Unhappy man! If indeed you have tasted of this deadly sin, pardon is not for such as you. Heaven is shut through all eternity to those who once open the accursed door of that Evil One and her magic arts.”

Then, lifting high his staff, he thundered forth these words—

“As all hope is past for leaf and flower to bloom on this dry stick; even so, all hope is past for your dead soul! You are now and for ever accursed!”

A shout rose on all sides, “Anathema.” And each man there congratulated himself that he was not such an one as this Tannhäuser. Even the worst sinner felt himself quite holy, in comparison, as the Pope rolled out his terrible judgment.

In that awful moment the heart of Tannhäuser seemed turned to stone. Despair swept over him like a great sea. He saw nothing—heard nothing, save the words that rang like a death-knell through his soul.

He staggered forth; and as he left the hall he heard distinctly a low, wild laugh, while a voice close to his ear whispered—

“Once mine, mine for ever!”

On, on he stumbled—where, he heeded not.

At last he sank exhausted, and for a time lost all consciousness.

When he awoke, the night had fallen. In the distance he heard the bells still ringing, and glad voices singing their song of praise and thanksgiving.

But to Tannhäuser these sounds of joy had now grown hateful, and, putting his hands to his ears, he tried to shut them out.

All was dead within him. No hope, no light any more in this world, or the next. "For ever accursed!" All he had suffered was in vain. Heaven was shut for ever to him. The Pope had cursed him!

He could nevermore see the face of Elizabeth. Nevermore return to his friends. He was accursed!

Then, in the stillness of the night, he heard once more a far-off strain of mysterious music.

"Ah!" he cried to himself, "at least there is one who will receive me—I will return to Venus! She shall console me, and make me forget all that I suffer."

With these words he rose up, full of new energy. Grasping his pilgrim's staff in feverish haste, he strode along the dark road. Out through the old archway he passed, and across the silent plains.

One thought only now possessed him—to get back to the Hörsel Mountains, and never be heard of or seen again on earth.

The following day was a very busy one for the Pope. There were many grand functions to be attended in the churches, and long Festal Anthems to be heard from beginning to end.

Then came the processions through the streets of Rome, gaily decorated with flowers and banners in honour of the feast.

All along the way were crowds of people, waiting with bowed heads and solemn hush, as the Holy Father passed, borne aloft by his chamberlains, and blessed them. After that came audiences with foreign kings, princes, and ambassadors.

Long before the end, the Pope was sorely weary of receiving homage and giving blessings.

But at length the busy day was over. The Pope came back to his own house, and turned for rest into his peaceful garden, shut in by high walls from the noisy city.

This garden, with its shady olive trees and illexes, its marble fountains and statues, was cool and green on the hottest summer day. The birds sang there, as free from care as in the

wildest forest. The Pope listened to their joyous notes, and envied them. His heart was full of care, and a deep unrest filled his mind.

A pale, haggard face, with wild, despairing eyes, had haunted him all day long.

As he passed through the crowded streets, and looked on the sea of human faces, he had beheld one only. Always the same—that of the man he had sent away in wrath, without one word of hope.

The Pope sat down and turned towards the west. The sun was sinking fast, in a flood of red, gold, and violet. He thought of his own life, setting fast; for he was a very old man.

He thought of his past deeds; and the remembrance of some gave him little satisfaction.

And then in the sky of the setting sun, as in the crowded street, he saw again those wild, despairing eyes.

Why did the face haunt him thus?

And for the hundredth time came the question, Had he made a great mistake about that sinful man? Had he, speaking in the place of God Himself, done his Master deadly wrong, and lost a soul He would have saved?

“O God,” he cried, “if this be so,—if, in my zeal

and wrath, I spake my words, and not Thy words, —O God undo my sin, and give him rest unto his soul!”

A strange peace seemed to fill the place, and a marvellous scent spread in the air, after this prayer of the old Pope. And in his own heart half the unrest was gone.

He stooped to pick up his staff, which had fallen to the ground. As he raised it, he uttered a great cry.

For lo! the old worn staff of olive wood had changed to a wondrous bough, blossoming with green leaves and fairest flowers, with a strange sweet scent, unlike anything of this earth.

It might have been the bough the angel-martyr brought from the fields of Paradise long years ago, as a sign to the unbelieving Roman—it was so radiant.

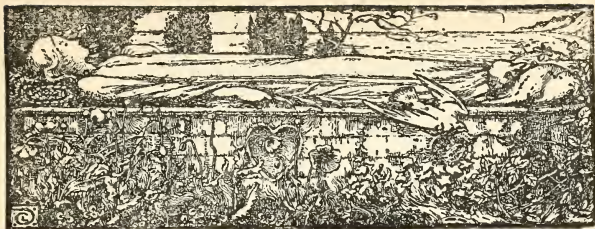
That night the messengers of the Pope were riding all through the city, seeking high and low for the rejected pilgrim.

But though they searched in every inn and convent, and inquired in all the villages round Rome, no one had seen Tannhäuser since his interview with the Pope.

Not even his old friend the priest knew what

had become of him. He could only say that Tannhäuser was a noble knight, who had travelled in his company from the far-distant country of Thuringia.

On hearing this, the Pope ordered that a band of young pilgrims, just starting on their homeward journey, should carry with them the flowering staff, and make all haste to seek out the pilgrim-knight, Sir Tannhäuser, if by any chance he might have returned to that land.



CHAPTER IV



HE leaves were turning red and gold in the woods round the Landgraf's castle.

The harvesters were busy gathering in the last sheaves of corn and the last bunches of ripe purple grapes. But the band of pilgrims who set out in the early spring-time had not yet returned from Rome.

Not far from the Wartburg, perched on the summit of a vine-clad hill, stood a small white convent. The good nuns who dwelt there had forsaken the world and its pleasures. They passed their days in prayer and fasting, in tending the sick, and other good works.

Every morning and evening their sweet, low voices might be heard in the convent chapel.

Very peaceful and happy they looked, kneeling together, with devout eyes raised to the beautiful altar-picture of their own "Lady of the Bleeding Heart."

But there was one among them who could not share their peace. Her heart was heavy with sin not her own, her eyes were dim with bitter tears, and her cheek grew daily more pale and wan with anxious waiting, praying, and fasting.

Even in this peaceful retreat, surrounded with the love and sympathy of the gentle nuns, Elizabeth found it hard to live through the weary months till the pilgrims should return.

When the sun rose in the morning, she longed for night. And when at length the darkness fell, she lay awake in her little convent cell, longing for the daybreak.

Wolfram, the faithful friend and true lover, saw the sad pale face of his Princess grow sadder and paler every day. He longed to bring her some comfort, some hope; for he would gladly have died for her. But all he could do was to watch over her from a distance, and to escort her back from

the little shrine in the valley, where she went daily to pray.

The time had now come however when, Wolfram assured the Princess, the pilgrims must ere long be home. Any day might see their joyful return.

And hope began to spring up in the heart of Elizabeth. She would go more often than ever to her favourite spot in the valley, to pray for the absent knight, and watch for his coming.

One evening, as the shadows of the pine trees were growing long and dim, Wolfram came down the mountain path and paused within sight of the well-known shrine.

There knelt Elizabeth, in her white nun's robe, praying with clasped hands. Wolfram stood under the pines and waited.

Presently a faint sound of singing came up the valley.

Elizabeth started, listening eagerly.

On it came, a slow, measured chant of joyful voices, and soon the pilgrims, in their brown robes, grasping the well-worn staves, came up the winding road.

Two by two they passed beneath the spot where Elizabeth stood, half-hidden by the little shrine,

eagerly scanning each one as he passed. But, among them all, she looked in vain for the face she longed to see.

Wolfram watched her silently, a great pity and pain at his own heart.

Tannhäuser had not returned !

Her last earthly hope was gone.

" Alas !" she cried, " he will never, never return ! "

Kneeling at the Virgin's shrine, Elizabeth poured out her heart in a fervent prayer that she might be taken from this sinful, sorrowful world ; then, as a spirit purified and freed from earth, she would seek his pardon at God's throne above.

The sun sank down behind the hills before Elizabeth rose to depart.

Wolfram, still keeping his faithful watch, stepped forward and begged to be allowed to escort her home.

She thanked him, shaking her head sadly. Her way lay yet higher up the mountain, she told him, and she would fain be alone.

And Wolfram, looking at her pale, sweet face, knew in his heart that where she was bound he could not follow, however great his love ; for he saw that she was going beyond the mountain heights.

Yet still he lingered, unwilling to leave the spot,

and followed Elizabeth with his eyes, till the dark pine trees hid her from sight.

The stars came out overhead, and one, more radiant than the rest, seemed to Wolfram specially akin to her, who was the star of his life. So taking up his harp he sang, beseeching this lovely evening star to watch tenderly over the spirit of Elizabeth, and to greet her lovingly when she left this earth and was wafted to the heights above.

Higher and higher up the mountain went Elizabeth. All that day she had fasted and prayed; and now, as the cold night air swept across the hills, a deadly faintness came over her.

She could not reach the mountain top—she must lie down and rest.

Then, on a sudden, there shone a great ray of light from the evening star above her. She gazed at it dreamily. The light came all about her, folding her round in its soft beams, and sending a glorious new life through her whole being. And with this new light and life, her despair and anxiety melted away, and she knew, with a great certainty, that all was well.

She gave a gentle sigh of perfect rest and content—and the spirit of Elizabeth was free.

And Wolfram sang on in the valley, while the

bright evening star shone down on him, as though answering his prayer.

Suddenly Wolfram ceased. The dark shadow of a man fell across the path. He was staggering along, supporting himself with a staff. As he came nearer, Wolfram saw his clothes were almost in rags. He paused a moment as if listening, then cried, in a hard, mocking voice—

“Surely I heard a harp-string! But it was too melancholy to have come from her gay abode!”

At the sound of this voice, Wolfram rose quickly, and going up to the wretched-looking man, asked him anxiously who he was.

“Who am I?” he answered, with a scornful laugh; “at least I know right well who you are! Wolfram, the famous minstrel!”

He bowed with mock respect, and the moonlight fell across his face. Wolfram started with surprise and horror.

“Tannhäuser! Is it possible? But surely,” he asked anxiously, “you have not ventured back here unpardoned?” The wild, reckless figure before him had little the air of a pardoned pilgrim.

“Have no fear, my worthy singer,” Tannhäuser cried scornfully; “I have not come to seek you, or any of your friends. But I should be glad if some-

one would set me on the road I seek. Once, I found it easily enough."

"What road is that?" asked Wolfram.

"The road to Venus Mountain?"

Wolfram shuddered.

"Do *you* know the way?" Tannhäuser whispered eagerly.

"Madman!" cried Wolfram, "your words strike terror to my soul. Is it possible that you have really been to Rome?"

At the mention of Rome all that he had suffered came back to him, and Tannhäuser cried furiously—

"Speak not to me of Rome!"

"But the Holy Festival?" asked Wolfram; "were you not there? I implore you to tell me."

"Oh, yes, I have been to Rome," Tannhäuser answered bitterly.

Something in his hopeless tone struck Wolfram with a great pity, and he begged the unhappy Tannhäuser to relate all that had befallen him, assuring him that he was still his friend.

Tannhäuser's fury melted before this unexpected sympathy. He, the outcast, the accursed of the Pope, had felt all mankind were now his foes. Since he bade farewell to Rome, and to all hope, he had suffered sorely.

People fled at the sight of his wild, despairing face and tattered pilgrim's garb.

"This must be some terrible sinner; the curse of God is surely on him," they whispered as he passed. Others said, "This is the Wandering Jew! See how recklessly he goes, and stays not for food or shelter, nor speaks 'good-day' to any on his road."

Mothers held back their little ones as he passed, warning them—

"Look not on that unhappy man, or evil will surely befall you."

So much suffering of mind and body had Tannhäuser undergone, it was wonderful he yet lived.

But now, at Wolfram's entreaty, he sank down on the nearest rock, and told the sad, hopeless story of his journey to Rome.

Wolfram listened, full of sorrow and sympathy. And as Tannhäuser rehearsed the terrible scene with the Pope, and repeated his awful curse, the memory of it woke again in him a storm of passion and fury. Once more the reckless longing seized him to forget all in the Venus Mountain. Springing up, he called out madly—

"O Venus! my goddess, where are you? I

long for you! I come to you! Nevermore will I leave you."

Wolfram implored him to cease; but he only called more longingly—

"Oh, come, my sweetest goddess. All men flee from me and curse me. I come to you; oh, lead me!"

He listened eagerly; and now, in the distance, came faint sounds of unearthly music.

Wolfram heard it also. Shuddering with dread, he tried to make Tannhäuser come away with him.

But by this time, Tannhäuser was like one possessed. The magic power of Venus was beginning to work. He had called on her, and not in vain.

A rosy light now filled the air, and a scent that seemed to lull and soothe began to steal even over Wolfram himself. Shadowy forms appeared in the distance. Nearer they came, and nearer, dancing in soft, swaying movements, in time with the intoxicating music.

"Oh, see! There are the nymphs! They dance, they wave their white arms towards me! Hear the witching music! She comes, my goddess, my fairest one!" cried Tannhäuser excitedly.

And there, indeed, descending in rosy clouds,

reclining on her sea-shell couch, was Venus herself, looking more radiantly fair than ever, her arms stretched out in welcome.

Tannhäuser rushed towards her with a cry of joy, but Wolfram seized him with a desperate clutch. He knew that now or never the battle must be fought and won.

"Welcome once more, unfaithful knight!" cried the bewitching voice of Venus. "With open arms I come to receive you, now that the world rejects and scorns you."

Then came a deadly struggle between Venus and Wolfram, and also between Tannhäuser, the despairing vagabond, and Tannhäuser, the noble knight, beloved of Elizabeth.

Venus put forth all her beguiling arts. Tannhäuser struggled desperately to free himself from Wolfram, and fly to her outstretched arms. Wolfram, the faithful friend, held on firmly to the frenzied Tannhäuser, knowing that all hope would indeed be over if the goddess won the day.

"Let me loose, for I will go! I have no other hope; I am accursed!" cried Tannhäuser.

And Wolfram answered—

"There is still hope. Away, ye demons; touch

not his soul! O friend, believe me, there is still hope, and you shall be saved."

"Never, never! And since I am banished from heaven, I will have the joys of hell!" he shouted madly, wrenching himself violently away.

Again Wolfram seized him, crying—

"Oh, listen and hear me! One name there is that shall free you from this bondage for ever, one name that shall save you! A sweet saint prayed for you on earth: soon as an angel she will bend in blessing over you, guiding you where she is gone—Elizabeth!"

Tannhäuser struggled no more.

He remained as if bound to the spot.

"Elizabeth!" he repeated.

And instantly, when as before he had named the Holy Virgin, Venus and her nymphs, the rosy clouds and the magic sounds, faded and vanished into the darkness. As they disappeared, a voice cried, wailing—

"Woe, woe! Lost to me for ever!"

And now, through the dark pine trees came bright torch lights; a solemn procession followed, slowly chanting a prayer for the soul of the maiden whose lifeless form they carried.

At the first sight of this sad procession, Wolfram's heart told him what had happened.

He turned to Tannhäuser, who still stood as one in a dream, and said—

“O friend, the angel who loves you is even now praying for you at God's throne; and her prayer is heard. You are saved!”

Nearer, nearer came the torch lights, while those who followed sang of the joys now awaiting the pure and holy spirit just departed.

“Do you hear what they sing?” asked Wolfram gently. And Tannhäuser replied in a faint, low voice, but with a new light in his dying eyes—

“I hear it.”

At a sign from Wolfram, they brought the bier on which Elizabeth lay and placed it down near Tannhäuser.

Wolfram took his friend's hand, and together they looked at the angel-face from which all sorrow and care had vanished for ever.

And Tannhäuser bent low over her whose great love had redeemed him, and, sinking down in a deadly swoon by her side, he murmured—

“Holy Elizabeth, pray for me!”

The solemn chant continued, but the bowed head was never raised again.



TANNHÄUSER DIES BY THE SIDE OF ELIZABETH

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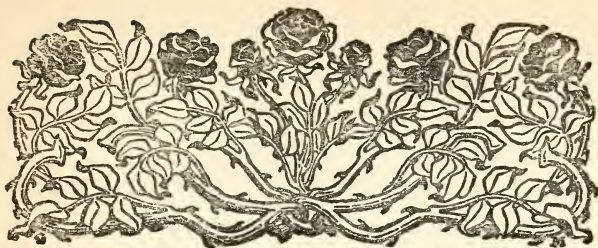
The hard battle of life was over at last; and Tannhäuser, the knight who had sinned so greatly, was saved through a love even greater than his sin.

Suddenly, across the east flashed the lovely light of coming dawn. And over the hills hastened a band of young pilgrims, bearing triumphantly in their hands a wondrous bough, with rarest leaves and blossoms. Wolfram took it from them, and placed it reverently in the lifeless hand of his friend.

And as the morning sun arose in all his glory a new life dawned for Tannhäuser and Elizabeth.

IV

LOHENGRIN



LOHENGRIN



CHAPTER I



ONCE upon a time there lived, in the ancient city of Antwerp, a beautiful maiden called Elsa.

She dwelt in a grand old palace: the walls were thick as any fortress, and the towers looked proudly down on the town.

Elsa's father was the Duke of Brabant, a noble

prince, who for long years had faithfully served his liege lord, the King of Germany, and had won much honour to Brabant.

Elsa had an only brother, the young Prince Godfrey; and these two loved each other more than any other brother and sister in the world.

One day the Duke was taken ill — so ill that he could no longer attend to the affairs of the State.

The Court doctor was called in. He was an old man with a flowing white beard, and an expression of such profound wisdom that it quite disguised his lack of skill. He looked at the Duke, felt his pulse, and became very grave.

"Most illustrious Prince," he said, "you must take complete rest and freedom from all care for one whole year."

Unfortunately these were the two most impossible things for the Duke to obtain. Pain robbed him of all rest, and the fear that he was about to leave his two children, so young and unprotected, alone in the world, oppressed him with anxious thoughts.

When the Court doctor saw his patient again, he found him so ill that he ordered a soothing draught. But this also failed to have any good

effect ; and a few days later all Brabant knew that their beloved Duke lay dying.

Elsa and her young brother Godfrey knelt by the bedside of their father. They wept as though their hearts would break, while he made known to them his last wishes.

As their mother had been dead many years, and they had no near relatives, the Duke then sent for his kinsman, Count Telramund. This man was imperious and hot-tempered, with manners uncouth as a bear ; but he was brave as a lion, and the Duke had full confidence in his good heart and knightly honour, which had often been proved in past years.

The Count hastened to obey the royal summons.

“ My trusted friend and kinsman, Frederick of Telramund,” said the Duke, “ I am dying. With my last breath I confide to thy care my beloved children, Elsa and Godfrey. Watch over them, protect them from all ill till Godfrey be of an age to reign, and Elsa is married to a husband she loves. Until then, I appoint thee as Regent and Protector in Brabant.”

Count Telramund knelt by the side of the dying Duke, and swore solemnly to fulfil the trust, and,

if needs be, to lay down his life for the young Prince and Princess.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the Duke. "I know my trust in thee can never be misplaced, loyal and true heart. And now, my cousin, is there aught that I can do for thee, in return for so great service?" he asked.

"Oh, most noble Prince, there is one boon I would crave, were it not so great a gift I scarce dare even to name it!" answered the Count. He glanced towards Elsa, who stood gazing out of the window with sad, tearful eyes.

"Whatever thy wish, cousin, it is granted, if it be in my power to bestow," said the Duke readily. "What is thy request?"

"Most gracious sovereign," stammered the Count, growing red to the roots of his tawny beard, "I love the Princess Elsa—wilt thou give her to me to wife?"

Elsa started. Their voices were low, but she had heard the Count's request. Without stirring, her hands clasped tightly, and her face deadly pale, she listened breathlessly for her father's reply.

"Gladly would I give my sweet child to thy safe keeping, noble cousin. But in this matter I must

leave the maiden free to choose for herself. And she accept thy hand, thou hast my full consent and blessing. More than this I cannot say."

The Count knelt and pressed his lips to the hand of the dying Duke, who, blessing Telramund, sank back exhausted, and bade him farewell.

Shortly after, the good Prince died, at peace with all, his mind quite easy about his beloved children.

Elsa, heartbroken at her father's death, found her only consolation in her young brother Godfrey. For a long time she refused to see anyone else.

Count Telramund often sought opportunity to speak with her, but she avoided him with dread. His loud voice and blustering ways were an offence to her; and as for his valiant deeds, Elsa thought he boasted of them over much. Since his request for her hand, she disliked him more than ever.

But the Count, quite unaware that his fair young cousin admired him so little, felt both wrath and indignation when, on his formally offering his hand, she refused to marry him. At first he begged humbly; but Elsa persisted in her refusal, saying she did not love him, and could never be his wife.

Then Telramund changed his tone, and de-

manded her hand as his right, the dying bequest of her father the Duke.

"My father left me free," answered Elsa, indignant. "Never would he wish me to give my hand where I could not give my heart also, Sir Count."

The Count ground his teeth with anger and disappointment. No woman, and very few men, had ever dared to contradict his wishes—he who had slain a dragon, and had never yet been worsted in duel or fight.

Sooner or later, he vowed, she should be his. Difficulties only made him more determined.

Now there was a wicked lady, of a tall, commanding figure, dark and handsome—Ortruda by name. She was very learned, and had studied all manner of sorceries and black arts, which enabled her to exert the magic power of a witch. Her forefathers had once been mighty princes, who reigned over Brabant and all the countries round. She regarded Elsa and Godfrey as usurpers, holding what rightfully belonged to her; and she hated them with a bitter hatred. Also, there was another and a deeper cause for her hatred towards Elsa; and that was, that she herself had long wished to marry Count Telramund.

One day, Telramund came to Ortruda and told

her how Elsa had dared to despise his love, and reject his hand. That he should confide in her pleased Ortruda well; also that Elsa should refuse the Count, though she loved her none the more for doing so.

“The impertinent minx, to take on such airs! Methinks ’twere high honour for her to mate with thy serving-man. Her fathers were no better when mine reigned here as kings.”

Telramund found comfort in Ortruda’s indignation, though he could not quite agree with her about the serving-man. His heart was set on marrying Elsa, and he was willing to wait long if only he might win her in the end.

When Ortruda saw this, she laid a deep plot, by means of which she hoped to turn his love from Elsa.

In the depths of the forest was a lonely tower. Here Ortruda was wont to retire and study sorcery, for long days and nights together. She became at last so practised, that she could by enchantments change people into different birds and beasts.

One day, Elsa and Godfrey were roaming together alone in the forest. Ortruda, always on the watch, followed them, unseen, at a distance. After awhile they sat down to rest by the side of a pool,

whose still depths, it was said, no one had ever fathomed.

Presently, Elsa and Godfrey were startled by hearing a piercing, pitiful cry, like that of some animal caught in a trap.

Godfrey started up, crying—

“I must go and free that poor beast! Rest here awhile, Elsa; I will return shortly.”

He sprang lightly through the thickly-growing bushes and trees, and was soon hidden from sight.

Elsa waited by the pool, thinking of all the happy plans she and Godfrey had been making for the future, when he would reign as Duke. The trees overhead rustled strangely, and Elsa, looking up, saw a great white swan circling round, and waving his wings wildly as though in distress. Then, with a sad cry, he flew away.

Elsa grew uneasy. Surely an hour must have passed, yet Godfrey had not returned! She called aloud—

“Godfrey, Godfrey! where art thou?”

But there was no answer save the echo of her own voice, which rang through the wood as though mocking her anxious cry.

Then, in deadly fear, she started up and tried to trace his steps, but the dense thicket left no track.

Pale and trembling, Elsa returned at last to the palace, and told how Godfrey had mysteriously disappeared.

That night the forest was searched from end to end with torches and lanterns, and all the following day the search continued, but not a trace of the missing boy could be found.

Two days after Godfrey's disappearance, Ortruda came to Telramund. She appeared in deep distress, saying she had something to reveal, and dared no longer keep silence.

Telramund, in despair at losing the boy whose guardian he had sworn to be, begged her to speak out if she knew aught that could throw light on the mystery.

"Alas!" replied Ortruda, "what I know is well-nigh too terrible to be spoken. Who will credit my dark tale?"

"Say on, I beseech thee! This is no time for silence. The whole country is astir!" cried Telramund.

"Yea, and envious tongues, alas, begin to whisper black suspicions of thee. For that cause, I have resolved at last to divulge the awful truth," replied Ortruda in low, trembling tones. "Listen," she continued; "thy search for Godfrey is useless—

he is dead ! He died by the hand of his sister Elsa !”

“Elsa ! Impossible ! That will I never believe !” exclaimed Telramund vehemently. “Why, they have ever loved each other tenderly.”

“Ay, so she would have us believe,” answered Ortruda grimly. “But, alas, it was not so. Envious hatred was in the heart of her, outwardly so good and gentle. Her brother, seest thou, stood in the path of her lover ! Godfrey once removed, she thought to reign as duchess, and raise her lover to her side.”

“Her lover !” cried Telramund, beside himself with jealous wrath. “What mean you ? Who is her lover ? Who dares to presume on what is my right alone ?”

“I know not who he is, for this she keeps most secret. But I have seen him with her, and he it was who helped her in the deed of darkness. Two days ago I sat alone meditating in my tower in the forest, when I espied Elsa and Godfrey sitting together by the pool—that awful pool where, ’tis said, a drowning man may sink for a thousand years, yet never touch the bottom. On a sudden I heard a cry, and looking, saw Elsa, aided by a stranger, whose face was turned from me, push

her young brother backward into the dread pool. Down, down he sank—the black waters closing silently over him! Methought I should have died of horror and grief!” Ortruda shuddered.

“Horrible! most horrible!” cried Telramund. “Thou sawest this with thine own eyes?”

“I saw it with these same eyes, that will I swear, though it were with my last breath!” replied Ortruda.

“Oh, what a fiend have I loved! Blind fool that I was!” cried Telramund. “Yet who could dream that such black sin dwelt in one so young and fair, verily like to an angel outwardly!” He marched to and fro like one beside himself.

“Ay,” said Ortruda, eyeing him askance; “and knowing that thou lovedst her, I would fain have kept silence. But when thine enemies whispered that thou, being next of kin, might thyself have caused the lad’s disappearance, then my love for thee made me bold to speak the dread secret.”

“I thank thee, Ortruda. Thou hast ever shown thyself my faithful friend,” said Telramund more gently. Then, looking at the dark lustrous eyes which met his with a tender gaze—

“Methinks,” he added, “it were better had I

given my love to thee, instead of wasting it on one so unworthy."

"Far better," thought Ortruda. But she only answered softly, "My father's house once ruled in this land, and, in justice, should be ruling still. Ah! were poor Ortruda queen, with what joy would she lay her kingdom at thy feet, noblest and bravest of men!"

It pleased Telramund greatly that Ortruda, who was so clever and handsome, should think so highly of him. He began to have a great opinion of her judgment, and asked himself if, after all, he could do better than make her his wife. He thought of Elsa now with horror and loathing. The murderess of her young brother! Horrible, truly! She had a lover too—she who had dared to scorn his love. Ah, well, it was he would scorn her now!

He turned to Ortruda. She was really very handsome, and a woman of mind too—a fitting mate even for a king! Telramund was ambitious, and felt he could wear a crown with dignity.

"Fair Ortruda," he said with a gracious smile, "methinks we have both a just claim to this kingdom now. Shall we unite our interests, and, hand in hand, mount the vacant throne together?" He took her hand in his.

“Ah, would that I were worthy to counsel one as great and wise as thou!” replied Ortruda humbly. But to herself she added, “With a little flattery one can win any man. They are all alike. Once married, and I will lead this one blindfold.”

“Worthy! Thou art worthy to be a queen!” cried Telramund, much pleased at her modest behaviour. “And that shalt thou be, noble and wise Ortruda! For here do I swear to make thee my wife, instead of her in whom I have been so woefully deceived. As for the murderess, her cruel deed shall be brought to light. She shall be tried by our king, Henry of Germany, and both she and her base lover will assuredly be condemned to death.”

In obedience to Telramund’s orders, Elsa was then put under arrest, and placed in a dark prison-cell, to await her trial before the King of Germany, who was shortly expected to visit Brabant.

No words can describe the sorrow and dismay of Elsa. To lose her beloved brother was terrible enough, but to be accused of his murder drove her well-nigh distracted. She was kept a close prisoner, no one save the followers of Telramund and Ortruda being allowed to come near her. In her grief and despair she knelt one night and prayed, pouring

out her soul in one long bitter cry for help. And all at once her prayer seemed taken up, as though on angels' wings; above the narrow prison-cell—up, up, till it pierced the utmost heights of the sky above. It was most strange. Elsa listened till she heard the faint echo fade away far overhead. And, as she wondered what it might mean, a gentle sleep closed her eyes. She dreamt; and in her dream she saw a noble knight in shining silver armour. Swiftly through the air he came, and, descending to her prison-cell, stood by her side. No word did he speak, but with looks and signs he bade her banish all fear and sorrow, and trust in him, for he was sent by Heaven in answer to her cry.

When Elsa woke, the bitterness of her grief had passed. The vision had departed, but she felt assured her prayer was heard, and that, sooner or later, the Heaven-sent knight of her dream would come and bring her deliverance.



ELSA'S DREAM

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CHAPTER II



AR away, in the mountains of Spain, there dwelt a holy band of knights, vowed to the service of all those in distress or need.

These knights possessed two precious relics—the sacred Spear which pierced the Saviour's side, and the Cup out of which He drank at the Last Supper. Both treasures had miraculous gifts, and were guarded by the brothers day and night in a temple of marvellous beauty, built by one of their kings.

The famous Knight Parsifal was at this time king of the Order, and under his reign the Knights of the Holy Grail were unsurpassed for valour and truth.

Far from the haunts of men they dwelt, but held themselves in readiness to set forth on any errand of mercy, directly the call came. For when any cry of distress went up to Heaven, the great bells of the Grail temple would commence to swing slowly to and fro, and at this sign the knights assembled in their temple, whatever the hour, day or night: there the Holy Grail would reveal to them, in letters of fire, what service was required.

The same night on which Elsa knelt in her prison-cell, far away in Antwerp, the mighty bells on Mount Salvat suddenly broke the stillness of the peaceful night. Swung by unseen hands, they called the knights to succour some unknown one in distress.

With Parsifal at their head, the brothers of the Holy Grail hastened to the temple.

Among them was one, Lohengrin, a young knight of most noble fame, son of Parsifal, the king.

The call of the bells had wakened him from a wonderful dream, more real than waking life.

He dreamt that he was guided swiftly through the air, till he stood in a fortress-prison, by the side of a maiden who knelt and prayed in sore

distress. Never had he seen anyone so fair, so pure and innocent-looking.

Lohengrin beholding her, loved her, and felt ready to die, if needs be, in her defence. He approached and tried to speak; but his lips were sealed—he was unable to utter a word. Only by looks and signs could he express his love, and implore the maiden to trust in him.

She seemed to understand this silent language, and to take comfort, for she looked in his eyes trustfully, and even smiled through her tears.

Then the call of the great bells sounded suddenly in his ear, and Lohengrin awoke. He started up and hurried to the temple.

Round the altar knelt the knights; while the king mounted the steps and took from a golden shrine the miraculous crystal Cup, known as the Holy Grail.

A dazzling ray of light instantly streamed down from the dome above the altar, lighting up the Cup, which then began to glow with letters of fire written round the brim.

Parsifal held the Cup aloft, that all might read the message—

“There is one falsely accused, in sore need and trouble—the Princess Elsa of Brabant.”

So ran the writing on the Holy Grail. The glowing letters slowly faded and vanished.

But while the knights discussed among themselves which of them should at once depart for Brabant, the Cup again glowed with another message—

“Let Lohengrin, the son of Parsifal, make ready and depart. He it is, appointed to be her champion.”

Lohengrin understood now the meaning of his dream; and he rejoiced greatly at being so chosen.

Kneeling before his father, he craved a blessing before setting out on his journey.

“Fare thee well, my son!” said Parsifal. “May the blessing of the Grail go with thee! Bear thou ever in mind the binding vow of our most holy Order: never shalt thou reveal thy name or race to living soul, save only if thou art conjured to do so in the name of love. But remember that, so soon as thy secret is spoken, thou must immediately depart, and, leaving all, return whence thou camest. For so the Grail commands.”

“All this will I faithfully obey, my father. And may the strength of the Grail uphold me,” answered Lohengrin.

Then, buckling on his armour and his sword, a golden horn slung round his neck, Lohengrin

mounted his black charger, and rode off into the silent forest.

On he rode. The tall, dark pine trees met over his head; the silver moon peeped between the branches, lighting him on his way. All the forest slept.

This midnight ride seemed to Lohengrin like a part of his wonderful dream. He thought of the weeping maiden, and urged on his horse with eager haste.

At length he came to the river which marked the boundary of the Grail dominions. He was about to ford the stream, when, to his amazement, he beheld a boat, drawn by a snow-white swan, evidently awaiting him.

Lohengrin dismounted, and recognised the swan as a bird which had not long since appeared among them, and taken up his abode with the knights. As a white swan had always been held a good omen by the knights, the bird received a hearty welcome. And the more so when, shortly after his arrival, the Grail revealed that this bird was none other than a youth of noble birth, the innocent victim of a wicked enchantment. Round the swan's neck was a fine gold chain of curious workmanship, with neither clasp nor fastening, so that

no man could remove it without injury to the bird.

From the day he appeared, the swan attached himself specially to Lohengrin. He would follow him about like a dog, and often gaze into his face as though he longed to speak with him.

Seeing this faithful bird awaiting him, Lohengrin asked him—

“Wilt thou that I go with thee, dear swan?”

The bird instantly bent his graceful head, and spread wide his white wings, as though impatient to start.

Lohengrin then dismissed his horse, bidding him return to Mount Salvat. The horse, a noble animal, who had borne his master safely in many a battle, gazed at him regretfully and turned obediently homeward.

Lohengrin stepped into the boat, and the swan sailed away joyfully with him.

Down the river they floated swiftly. The swan seemed quite sure of his way. Even when they came at last to the sea, he never paused, but steered a steady course right out of the bay, and away across the wide ocean.

For many a day they sailed along, the white swan and the knight in shining armour.

Every night, when the stars shone out overhead, Lohengrin lay down in the little boat, and slept soundly till the first streak of dawn shot a silver thread across the far horizon.

And every night there came to him in his sleep a vision of the Holy Grail, glowing, deep and lustrous, with miraculous light. This vision refreshed Lohengrin more than meat and drink, and enabled him to go fasting all the way.



CHAPTER III



IN the city of Antwerp great preparations were going forward.

King Henry of Germany had arrived in state, and had summoned all the ministers and

chief nobles of Brabant to appear before him.

The place of meeting was a meadow on the banks of the River Scheld, outside the city walls. In this meadow grew the famous Judgment Oak, under whose ancient branches the rulers of many a bygone age had sat and judged the people—righteously and unrighteously, according to the light that was in them.

Elsa, in her prison-cell, was wakened early with the news that she would be tried this day before the king, in face of all the people.

She heard as though it scarce concerned her.

Since the vision of the knight in shining armour, she no longer seemed to dwell in the dark prison. Her thoughts were far away, and she cared nothing for what took place around her. The attendants who brought her food whispered together that her mind was certainly becoming distraught.

It was noon when the king, with his heralds, outriders, and a numerous retinue, proceeded in solemn state to the Judgment Oak. Mid the cheers and blessings of the people, he ascended a gorgeous throne prepared for him.

Facing the king stood the nobles of Brabant, with Frederick of Telramund at their head, and by his side the wicked Ortruda, now his wife.

"Hail, hail! welcome to thee, Henry of Germany, our liege lord and most gracious king!" shouted all the loyal Brabantians.

"Heaven bless ye, worthy liegemen of Brabant," replied the king. "But it grieveth me to hear there is strife and trouble in your midst. Approach, Frederick of Telramund; for thee I know, as a knight of unsullied honour and fame! Speak, and tell me the cause of this dissension."

Count Telramund bowed low before the king. Then, in a clear ringing voice, told his story, and made his accusation against Elsa, Princess of

Brabant, of whose horrible crime he said he had, alas, convincing proof. He then claimed the kingdom of Brabant for himself, as next of kin to the late duke, and also in right of his noble wife, Ortruda, whose fathers once ruled in that land.

"Now, O most noble king, thou hast heard me fully," he concluded. "Nought have I spoken but the truth—my oath upon it. Be thou our judge."

The crowd shuddered with horror at the story of Elsa's crime. Their own princess, so gentle and fair, the cruel murderess of her brother! Impossible! Yet who dare dispute it, since Count Telramund, whose honour no man could doubt, himself swore to the fact.

"What terrible accusation dost thou bring?" exclaimed the king. "Is such an unnatural crime possible!"

"Ay, only too possible, O king!" replied Telramund. "And this the motive which explains all: she has a secret lover, and, Godfrey once out of her path, she thought herself to reign as queen, and raise this same lover beside her on the throne."

The count spoke bitterly, remembering how Elsa had refused his hand.

Ortruda uttered not a word; but her eyes glittered like those of a snake.

"Bid the accused appear!" cried the king.
"The trial shall forthwith begin."

The herald blew his trumpet, and proclaimed the king's order, that Elsa of Brabant should be immediately brought before him.

There was a stir in the crowd. All eyes turned towards her as Elsa appeared, followed by her ladies. Slowly she walked to the foot of the throne, gazing before her like one in a dream.

The people whispered as she passed—

"How pure and innocent the maiden looks!"

"Art thou Elsa of Brabant?" asked the king.

Elsa bowed her head.

"Dost thou know the charge that is brought against thee?" he demanded sternly.

Again Elsa assented, drooping her head sadly, but without speaking.

"What answer canst thou make? Dost admit thy guilt?" the king inquired.

She gazed around her with a bewildered air, as though trying to remember something long forgotten.

"Alas," she sighed, "my poor brother!"

The people murmured—

"'Tis marvellous! What can it mean?"

"Speak, Elsa!" urged the king, wondering at her

strange behaviour. "Dost thou not trust in thy king?"

Then Elsa spoke in a low gentle voice, as to herself when alone in the prison—

"In my misery I knelt one night and besought God's aid. My woeful cry seemed all at once caught up to the highest heaven. I listened wondering, then peace fell on my spirit, and a gentle sleep came over me."

The king thought Elsa's mind was certainly distraught, whether from brooding on her crime, or on her innocence and the injustice of her imprisonment, he could not tell.

"Come, Elsa," he said, in a rousing tone, "defend thyself now before the judge."

But Elsa appeared neither to hear nor understand, and continued her dream with a look of rapture—

"Borne through the air he came—a knight of such perfection and nobility never yet I saw! Clothed in glittering armour—in his hand a sword—slung round his neck a golden horn! No word he spake, but gazed on me full tenderly. Peace and comfort came to me with his look. That knight will be my champion and deliverer."

The king was sorely perplexed. This dreamy maiden hardly seemed like a criminal.

He turned to Count Telramund—

“Frederick, thy truth and thine honour no man can gainsay, but bethink thee whom thou art accusing of this terrible crime!”

The count’s brow darkened.

“I am not deceived by her fantastic talk. Ye hear all, how she prates of a lover! Deigned I to do so, I could attest her guilt by abundant proof, but to that course I will not stoop. Let he who dares doubt my honourable word come forth and meet me, sword to sword!”

He looked round defiantly, but not a man moved.

“We are all on thy side. Put up thy sword,” answered the nobles of Brabant.

It was well known that Telramund had never yet been beaten in single combat, and his last speech had quite convinced them of Elsa’s guilt.

The king was in a sorry fix. Looking at the sad, fair face of the prisoner, he could not find it in his heart to believe her guilty. Yet he held the count as a true and honourable knight, incapable of falsehood; one who had, besides, risked his life for king and country.

"In truth, Frederick of Telramund," he said, never could I doubt thy good faith and honour. Thou who hast ever proved thyself my trusty champion. God alone can judge this matter!" With that King Henry drew his sword and thrust it in the ground, in token that the case was beyond his power for judgment. Turning to the count, he then asked solemnly—

"Frederick of Telramund, wilt thou in mortal combat let Heaven's ordeal decide thine accusation as true or false?"

"Yea, that will I, O king," answered Telramund, with proud confidence.

"And thee also, I ask, Elsa of Brabant, wilt thou abide by Heaven's decree in the mortal combat that shall be fought for thy cause?"

Elsa's eyes were fixed on the far distance.

"Yea, that will I," she replied slowly.

"What champion shall defend thee?" asked the king.

"Ah, now we shall hear the name of her lover!" cried Telramund.

"That knight whom Heaven sent me! He and none other shall be my champion," replied Elsa. "And this is the reward I offer. He shall wear my father's crown, and high honour I shall deem

it to give to him my land, my wealth, and my hand."

"A prize worth fighting for!" murmured the people. Their hearts beat true to their princess, in spite of appearances against her.

"Let the summons go forth!" cried the king.

The heralds and trumpeters then marched to the outposts and proclaimed the challenge, so that all might hear it, far and near—

"Let him who will fight in mortal combat for Elsa of Brabant now appear!"

There was a long pause, and breathless silence followed. The echo of the trumpet's blast died away into the distance.

But no one appeared in answer to the call.

Elsa listened, looking round on all sides with anxious, expectant gaze.

Telramund turned to her triumphantly—

"Ha! see whether the charge is false or no! On my side are right and truth."

"It looks bad for her cause that no answer cometh!" said the men, shaking their heads.

"O gracious king," implored Elsa, "I beseech thee let the call go forth once again to summon my knight. He dwells so far he has not heard."

The king felt pity for the maiden.

"Let the summons go forth yet once more," he ordered.

Again the heralds proclaimed the challenge.

There followed a longer pause and a longer silence.

No one stirred. The people scarcely seemed to breathe, so great was the suspense and expectation.

At length a sigh swept through the crowd. The men whispered, awestruck, to each other—

"In dark silence comes the judgment of Heaven!"

Elsa fell on her knees, while her maidens closed round as though to protect her.

"O Lord," she cried, "send my knight speedily, I beseech thee. Once, at Thy command, he came to me. Oh, send him now again. Tell him of my sore need," she implored in despair.

Her women knelt also, weeping and praying—

"Send Thy help, O Lord! Save this pure and innocent maid!"

Suddenly a cry went up from the people standing near the river-bank—

"See! A wondrous sight! A swan! a swan drawing a boat! And, standing in the prow, behold a knight in shining armour. Lo, he comes with utmost speed!"

All rushed forward eagerly to see.

The king from his throne looked towards the river and beheld the amazing sight.

Elsa, on her knees, listened spellbound, in a transport of joy.

Frederick of Telramund, struck dumb with awe and astonishment, looked at Ortruda. Her face had turned to an ashen hue. Her glittering eyes were dull, as though the light within had suddenly gone out. She gazed at the swan with greater terror than had he been a dragon.

"'Tis a miracle! A miracle of Heaven!" exclaimed the men.

The women, on their knees, cried joyfully—

"Oh, God be thanked, who hast heard our prayer! Hail to the Heaven-sent one who comes to save the guiltless!"

The boat had now reached the bank. Lohengrin stepped lightly to land, and then turned lovingly to the swan—

"My thanks to thee, beloved swan," he said. "Return now o'er the waters to the blessed land from whence we came. Faithfully hast thou fulfilled thy task. Fare thee well, beloved swan."

He gazed sadly after his faithful companion, as the swan slowly turned with the boat and swam away down-stream.

The crowd made way for him eagerly, as Lohengrin advanced to the king's throne and bowed in low obeisance. As he raised his head, Elsa turned, and uttered a cry of joy at beholding no other than the knight of her vision.

"Hail, royal Henry! May the blessing of Heaven ever rest on thee!" said Lohengrin.

"Welcome, Sir Knight!" replied the king graciously. 'Surely by a miracle divine thou art come to this land?'

"I have been sent, O king, to fight for the honour of an innocent maiden, in sore need and distress," answered Lohengrin. Then, going before Elsa, he asked her—

"Wilt thou trust thy cause to me, O Elsa of Brabant? Wilt thou take me for thy champion without doubt or fear?"

Elsa raised her eyes to his. Just such a knight she had always pictured as her hero.

"My deliverer, my knight—with my whole heart do I trust thee!" she answered.

Lohengrin knelt and, taking her hand in his, asked—

"And if, with Heaven's help, I win this fight for thee, wilt thou consent to be my bride?"

"I am thine—thine only, my knight. All I

have I give thee gladly!" said Elsa, with shining eyes.

"One promise wilt thou give me, my beloved? if thou art indeed willing to trust me fully!"

"To thee will I promise anything," Elsa answered readily.

"Then if thou desirest, as I, that nothing part us ever,—that thy people and thy country become from henceforth my people and my country,—never shalt thou ask of me my name and race, or whence I come," said Lohengrin earnestly.

"Never will I seek to know thy secret. Thy love is enough for me — nought else do I desire!"

"But Elsa, beloved, think well what it is I ask," urged Lohengrin. "Never must thou desire this knowledge, and never must this secret between us cause thee sadness."

Elsa was troubled that Lohengrin repeated his request. There was nothing in the world she would not gladly grant to him—her champion, her deliverer, her love.

"Thou hast never doubted my innocence," she answered. "Dost thou not trust in me? And shall not I also trust in thee, my knight, whate'er thou askest of me?"

Lohengrin clasped her to his heart.

"Elsa, my beloved," he cried joyfully, "I love thee!"

And Elsa felt as if the gates of Paradise had opened.

The king looked on, convinced that Heaven had indeed undertaken the judgment of this difficult case, and very thankful that it no longer rested with him.

Then Lohengrin stood forth, and, in a ringing voice that all might hear, proclaimed—

"Hear now, all ye people, and ye nobles of Brabant! I hereby declare, before Heaven and before all men, by my honour as a knight, that free from every shadow of guilt is the maiden Elsa, Princess of Brabant. False and unfounded is thy black charge, Frederick of Telramund, and that will I prove by Heaven's ordeal!"

Telramund advanced with angry mien and flashing eyes—

"What magic brought thee here, Sir Stranger, I know not. Thy talk is bold enough, I trow! But my answer is not in words. This, my good sword, shall defend mine honour. May victory be to right and truth, say I!"

Lohengrin turned towards the throne—

"We await thy command, O king, to commence the combat."

The king ordered the fighting-ring to be measured; and this being done, he then besought Heaven that in this fight victory might be, not as in other fights, to skill and strength, but to the one on whose side was right.

And all the people fervently echoed the good king's prayer.

Elsa's eyes were fixed on her knight. Like a glorious sun-god he seemed to her, in his glittering silver armour. Never mortal man half as noble and as beautiful. Elsa was sure the knight did not live who could vanquish such a foe; but yet her whole soul went forth in a prayer for his safety.

Count Telramund set his teeth, and fixed a dark mistrustful look on Lohengrin. He knew no fear, but never before had he dealt with an opponent who came to meet his sword in answer to a maiden's prayer, borne over the seas by a swan. The thing displeased him—it savoured of mystery and miracle, and Count Telramund disliked both.

The signal was given, and the combat began.

Scarce a breath could be heard. Every eye was fixed on the gleaming swords, as they cut the air like flashes of lightning, and clashed with sharp, ringing strokes.

A few intense moments, which seemed to Elsa's beating heart a very eternity; then a crash of falling armour, a wild shout from the people, and the fight was over.

Telramund had fallen; over him, like an angel of judgment, stood Lohengrin.

"Through Heaven's victory, thy life is mine!" he cried. "I give it thee again, that thou mayest use it for repentance."

"Victory, victory! Hail to the hero!" shouted a thousand glad voices.

"The victory I owe to thy innocence alone," said Lohengrin to Elsa. "All that thou hast suffered shall now be atoned to thee."

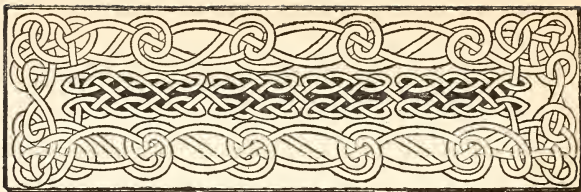
Then Lohengrin and Elsa were lifted on the shields of the nobles, and all the people marched round them in a triumphal procession, shouting a hymn of joyful thanksgiving, in which the good King Henry himself joined lustily.

Only Ortruda and the defeated Telramund stood sullenly apart.

"Woe is me! Mine honour and fame are

undone," muttered the count. "It would seem indeed that Heaven is against me."

Ortruda, with clenched hands, asked herself in dismay, "Who can this be? Before whom even I feel my powers weaken! Who? and from whence?"



CHAPTER IV



HE stars came out in the deep blue sky of night, waiting for the summer moon.

The stately walls of the royal palace of Antwerp threw mysterious shadows all around,

And in the darkness of these shadows crept two figures stealthily. They seated themselves at length under a tree which faced the windows of the Princess Elsa's apartments.

Looking up, they saw a light still burning.

Then they talked together earnestly in muffled tones.

By and by the moon arose, and cast her silvery light about, shifting the shadows according to her royal pleasure.

The two dark figures, a man and woman, moved with the shadows, still keeping close to the palace. They took no thought of rest or sleep that night.

Not until the dawn was near at hand did the man arise, and exclaim with an impatient gesture—

“Come, partner of my shame! Else will the light of day find us here still.”

“Nay, here I stay. Some power holds me,” answered the woman. “I stir not till I have found some potent poison which shall end both our disgrace and their joy.” She glanced at the window, and her eyes shot a fiery glance out of the darkness.

The man looked at her, and shuddered.

“Ah, why did I listen to thee, thou terrible Ortruda! Through thy fault I have lost all that made life dear. My honour, position, fame! Gone! all gone!” he groaned. “Sooner had I died! Cursed art thou, thrice cursed!”

Ortruda turned to the man, a scornful light in her eyes. She was for action, and despised useless regrets and groans.

“Frederick of Telramund, why dost thou mistrust me?” she asked quietly.

“Why?” he cried wrathfully. “Was it not on thy false word that I accused the guiltless, and

condemned an innocent maid? Thou who didst swear that thine own eyes beheld her murder the youthful Godfrey! Through thy false word I renounced Elsa and married thee. Aye, and through thy false word I engaged in that woeful combat, and brought on me the vengeance of Heaven!"

"Heaven!" laughed Ortruda scornfully; "know this, that hadst thou fought with spirit, and succeeded in shedding even one drop of thy foe's blood, the victory would have been to thee—the magic spell which protects him, broken."

Telramund gazed in astonishment at Ortruda.

"Methought he conquered through Heaven's might!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha! Give me but the chance, and I will show how weak is the power who protects him. Come closer, and I will whisper thee my plot."

Ortruda lowered her voice to a whisper. Frederick came nearer, shuddering, yet fascinated, like a bird in the power of a snake.

"Dost thou know who is this mysterious hero, drawn hither across the sea by a wild swan?" she asked.

"Nay, I know not," he answered.

"Hearken now to me," said Ortruda. "It is

forbidden him to reveal either his name or country. That, his own words allowed. The reason I will tell thee. Should he do so, all his magic power instantly vanishes. There is but one person who can tear his secret from him—she whom he so strictly forbade to ask him.”

“Ha! Elsa! She must be made to do this!” cried Telramund eagerly.

Ortruda looked at him and smiled. Her smile was very terrible.

“Ah, how quickly thou art learning to understand,” she purred softly.

“But how shall this be done?” he asked.

“We must on no account leave this place,” answered Ortruda, “though sentence of banishment has been unjustly passed on us. Watch thou the opportunity to step boldly forward and charge thy foe with having averted the true judgment by evil power of magic. This will awaken Elsa’s fears. Heed well what I say: one smallest wound of thy sword renders him weak and powerless. Not in vain have I studied in the lonely forest tower!”

Telramund looked doubtfully at Ortruda. The mention of that tower recalled her falsehood about Elsa.

"Is this verily the truth that thou sayest? If thou art again deceiving me, then woe be to thee!" he cried.

"How thou ravest!" said Ortruda, with quiet contempt. If thou wilt be but silent and watchful, thou shalt taste the sweets of revenge. But—hist!"

The window opposite opened softly. Ortruda and Telramund drew back farther into the shadow.

A white-robed figure came out on the balcony. A sweet voice spoke.

Little did the maiden think whose piercing eyes were watching her, only a few paces off.

She gazed at the starry sky and over the sleeping city, and fancying herself alone with the peaceful night, poured out her heart in joyful thanksgiving. Only last night she had lain in a prison-cell, with nought on earth to comfort her, save the memory of her vision and the hope it brought. Now that bright vision had become a glorious reality. Sorrow and fear had fled before the presence of her knight, like darkness in face of the sun.

"Ha! It is she!" hissed Ortruda, drawing her hood low over her face.

"Elsa!" sighed Telramund, thinking of all he had once hoped for, and all he had lost.

Ortruda whispered in his ear—

"Go thou, and leave her alone with me. Thy hero is for thee."

Frederick retired unwillingly, wondering how his fearsome wife was going to entrap the innocent Elsa. A feeling of pity for her mingled with his desire for vengeance.

"Elsa!" cried a wailing, miserable voice.

Elsa started. "Who calls me? How woefully my name rings through the darkness!" she cried, shuddering.

"Is my voice so strange to thee?" answered Ortruda piteously. "Wilt thou repulse one in sore distress?"

"Ortruda! Thou! What doest thou here, and at this hour, unhappy woman?" asked Elsa, in surprise.

"Unhappy woman, indeed!" repeated Ortruda meekly; but her eyes gleamed with a dangerous light.

Elsa heard only the wailing voice, and her heart melted with pity.

"Ah, woe is me!" moaned Ortruda. "What have I done, that such dark trouble should fall on me? I dwelt alone in the forest, injuring no one, bewailing in solitude the departed glory of my father's house. Yet disgrace, worse than death, has over-

whelmed me. How different thy fate! After a brief time of trouble, every cloud has vanished, and life smiles gloriously before thee. Ah, thou art right to banish my unhappy presence from thy sunny path!" She sighed bitterly.

"Most unworthy should I be of my great happiness, could I spurn one in misery such as thine, Ortruda. Come, enter my dwelling! I myself will open the door to you." So saying, Elsa disappeared from the balcony, forgetting in her tender-hearted pity, the strict injunctions of Lohengrin, that she should have nothing to do with Ortruda.

"Ha! Now is my time!" whispered Ortruda to herself. "Help me, ye gods! Grant me the cunning and the craft I need for my just vengeance!"

"Ortruda, where art thou?" called the gentle voice of Elsa.

"Here, at thy feet!" replied Ortruda, throwing herself down before the white-robed figure who sought her in the darkness.

"Kneel not to me, I beseech thee, Ortruda," cried Elsa, much distressed. "It pierces my heart to see thee thus in the dust before me. Thou, whom I have always beheld in pride and magnificence! Ask not my pardon. Freely I forgive thee, if in the past thou hast borne malice or hatred against

me. And it in aught thou hast suffered through my fault, I pray thee pardon me in like manner."

"How can I thank thee for such gracious favour?" returned Ortruda, in tones of great humility.

"And for thy husband Telramund," continued Elsa, "I will beseech my noble bridegroom on the morrow, that he show him grace and pardon. So let me see thee once more restored to happiness. Arrayed in thy robes of state, come thou with me to the minster, where our marriage will to-morrow be celebrated before God and all men."

"Thou loadest me with chains of gratitude," said Ortruda, cringing before Elsa. "For ever must I remain thy debtor. Only one way is there in which I may perhaps repay thee—by my knowledge of the hidden arts I may be able to protect thy life, and warn thee should grave danger arise."

"What meanest thou?" asked Elsa, in astonishment.

"Trust not thy happiness too blindly," replied Ortruda darkly, "lest some evil entrap thee unawares."

A chill little breeze heralded the coming dawn, Elsa trembled as she inquired anxiously—

"But what manner of evil?"

Ortruda drew closer, and lowered her voice—

"Dost know by what magic art *he* came to thee?"

"Ah, poor Ortruda! I see thou canst not measure the boundless confidence of love such as mine!" Elsa gave a sigh of relief. Evil and her knight of the shining armour could never be thought of in the same breath. "Never," she continued, "canst thou have known the bliss that comes of perfect trust. Oh, let me teach thee! It will bring thee a joy without regret. Come now with me."

And Elsa took Ortruda's hand and led her gently into the palace.

The vengeful look on Ortruda's face was hidden by the darkness. Elsa suspected no evil.

As they entered the palace together, Telramund stepped out of the shadow which had concealed him.

"So, evil enters in that house! Ah, well!" he sighed, "complete thy plot, thou terrible woman! I am powerless to stem the tide of thy will. Evil has me in its toils—I cannot go back. One thing alone I desire now—vengeance on him who has robbed me of my honour!"



CHAPTER V



T was the Princess Elsa's wedding-day.

The sober old city of Antwerp had blossomed out in colours gay as a spring garden, with banners, ribbons, garlands of flowers, and

triumphal arches.

Not a burgher or a prentice but kept holiday.

Royal weddings were not an everyday sight ; more especially when the bride was a princess of such beauty and virtue, and the bridegroom a knight who had risked his life for her sake.

Every maid in Antwerp would gladly have gone through fire and water just for a sight of the knight in silver armour. Greatly were those envied who had seen him arrive, drawn by the snow-white swan,

The bells of the old cathedral rang out a joyful chime. From every quarter came a stream of people, all hurrying to secure the best places from which to see the bridal procession. Guarding the entrance of the cathedral, on either side, were stationed knights and nobles in full court dress, ablaze with medals and decorations, helmets and waving plumes. They looked down with lofty contempt on the pushing, eager crowd. A trumpet sounded, and silence followed with a sudden hush. The king's herald stepped forward and proclaimed aloud—

“Hear, all ye good people of Brabant! His most gracious majesty is hereby pleased to make known to you his royal will and pleasure. The country and crown of Brabant, the king confers upon that Heaven-sent hero whom your princess weds to-day. And since the noble knight declines the title of duke, his majesty commands that he bear among you that of Protector of Brabant!”

“Long may he live and dwell among us! Protector of Brabant!” cried the people, cheering lustily.

One voice, however, did not join the cheering, but muttered low threats and vows of vengeance.

“She comes! She comes! Make way for the

bride," sang a chorus of voices. And Elsa appeared, more beautiful than a spring morning.

Little children, clad in white, strewed her path with flowers. Maidens of high degree followed, bearing her bridal train. Never had a fairer, happier maid passed through the ancient doorway to become a bride.

Smiling and bowing graciously, Elsa ascended the cathedral steps, when suddenly her way was barred by a tall commanding figure, who pushed through the astonished crowd and stood before her. It was Ortruda.

"Back, I say!" she cried wrathfully. "Thinkest thou that I am going to follow thee, like a serving-maid! No longer will I suffer it! The time has come when thou shalt bow before me!"

The attendants and courtiers stood aghast.

"The woman must be mad!" they exclaimed to one another.

Elsa could scarcely believe that this was the same Ortruda who, a few hours before, had knelt in the dust at her feet. She remembered, too late, Lohengrin's warning. Pale and trembling, she cried—

"Ortruda! Is it possible? What has happened to change thee thus terribly?"

Ortruda gave a mocking laugh.

"Thinkest thou," she answered, "that because I foolishly forgot my high position and my worth for one short hour, I must for ever after approach thee crawling? My lord was first in all the land! Not a foe but feared his sword, not a tongue but spake his praise, until an unjust judgment passed banishment upon him. But thy hero! No man ever heard of him! Thou thyself canst not even give him a name."

The people murmured indignantly—

"Will no man silence this slanderous woman?"

But all trembled, remembering her reputation as a witch, and not daring to brave her wrath.

Elsa alone, though horrified at the change in Ortruda's conduct, feared not to answer her boldly—

"Thou ruthless woman! Let me tell thee, so noble and so spotless is my knight, that not a soul can look on him and doubt his perfect virtue. Was it not in Heaven's own ordeal he won the victory over thy lord? Witness, all ye people," she cried, turning to the listening crowd, "Was it not well proved who fought then for right and truth?"

"Thy hero it was!" answered the people with one voice. But many breathed a hasty prayer—

"May the holy saints defend us!" as Ortruda's glance of scorn swept over them.

Fortunately at this moment appeared the king's outriders, followed by the royal bodyguard, and King Henry himself, riding side by side with the bridegroom.

"What! Ho!" cried the king, looking at the threatening figure standing across the bride's path. "Who dares to make strife on a wedding morn?"

Lohengrin hastened to Elsa's side.

"What do I see? Why is this terrible woman near thee?" he asked.

"Oh, my deliverer, protect me from her! Pardon me, that I forgot thy warning. Seeing her in misery at my door last night, I took her in. Behold now how she turns on me, and mocks me for my trust in thee!"

Lohengrin stood between Ortruda and the trembling Elsa.

"Begone, thou fearful woman!" he cried. "Carry elsewhere thy poison. Here is no soil in which it can take root." Then tenderly, to Elsa, he said—

"Beloved, come! Let these tears be forgotten in joy."

"Hold there!" cried a loud harsh voice. O

king, hearken, I pray ! I have somewhat to make known. Greatly hast thou been deceived. The combat was no Heaven's ordeal, for by the evil power of magic justice was turned aside. Here, before all men, I challenge him, the impostor, to declare his name and race, and from where he came, drawn hither by that unholy bird.—If he dare not say, methinks it looks bad for his knightly truth and honour ! ”

Lohengrin faced Telramund, and answered proudly—

“ It is not to one who so forgets all honour, that I shall stoop to vindicate mine own.”

Telramund gnashed his teeth with fury, and again addressed the king—

“ I appeal to thee, illustrious prince ! Demand thou a reply from this unknown hero. He will scarcely dare to call thee unworthy of his answer.”

But the king found it necessary to occupy himself with the gold trappings of his charger, and ignored the count's appeal.

Lohengrin again confronted the wrathful Telramund—

“ All honour would I ever show to his most illustrious majesty ; but there is one only to whom

I am bound to reveal my secret—that one is Elsa, my bride.”

Lohengrin looked at Elsa, hoping her eyes would meet his in trustful love. But, alas, her head was bowed, doubt and trouble were in her face. Lohengrin feared for one dread moment that the wicked Ortruda’s poison had, after all, begun to work. One moment only ; then, to his joy, Elsa raised her head, and shaking off all doubt, she cried—

“What he keeps secret, that he does in wisdom. She whom he has saved, shall she not trust him?”

And the king added heartily—

“My hero, pay no regard to evil-speakers. Thou art too far above them for such to tarnish thy spotless fame.”

The nobles then pressed round Lohengrin, assuring him of their trust and devotion, even though he should never see fit to reveal his name ; and the wedding procession entered the cathedral in solemn state.

Lohengrin and Elsa, hand in hand, vowed to each other that nothing on earth should ever shake their love and trust, in the future.

Frederick of Telramund gazed after them,

muttering gloomily. A voice at his ear made him start.

"All goes well! Bide thou the time. Shed but one drop of his blood, and, remember, all his power vanishes."

Telramund grasped the hilt of his sword, and Ortruda's eyes gleamed triumphantly.



CHAPTER VI



THE wedding-feast was over. The wedding - guests had gone. Elsa and Lohengrin were alone at last. Together they sat at the window, looking out on the star-lit night.

They talked of love and of each other. Never had the stars smiled down upon a happier pair.

Elsa related her wonderful vision of the knight in silver armour, and Lohengrin told his marvellous dream of the imprisoned maiden. They discovered, that even before they met in the mysterious dream-world, they had loved each other. Had they not always pictured one another in some far-off happy future ! And now that far-off future had actually become a joyful present.

"Elsa, beloved!" whispered Lohengrin.

Elsa sighed. A tiny cloud crept over her heart at the thought that she knew no name by which to call her love.

"How sweet my name sounds on thy lips!" she answered. "Would that I might learn to make thine ring as softly!"

Lohengrin heard the regret in her voice. He strove to turn her thoughts from the dangerous subject. But Elsa continued, as though forced to return to it—

"Ah, show thou thinkest me worthy of thy trust! Now that we are alone, let thy secret be buried in my heart, safe, where never the world can reach it."

"Have I not shown thee highest trust, beloved Elsa?" answered Lohengrin. "I have trusted in thy promise. Now my greatest joy is in thy love. No gift, not even the king's own crown, would I take in exchange for the priceless treasure of thy heart: it is the only reward I ask for all I have left behind. For not out of night and sorrow did I come to thee, but out of light and glory."

"Alas! woe is me!" cried Elsa, in sore distress. "Then art thou farther removed, and I yet more unworthy, than ere I dreamt! Any day may rob

me of thee ! Ere long thou wilt surely regret thy humble choice, and long after thy departed glory." Tears blinded her eyes. Lohengrin saw, too late, that what he had told her but increased her doubt and unhappiness. She longed now more than ever to be trusted with his secret, that so she might prove his lasting love. A chill fear crept round the heart of Lohengrin—a terrible foreboding. Tenderly he tried to soothe Elsa and quiet her fears, but all in vain.

"The fear lest thou depart will haunt me day and night ! Ah, if I knew some way to bind thee to me ! Could I but offer my life in thy service, as thou didst for me !" she sighed.

"Thou givest me all I desire, when thou dost trust me with undoubting heart," answered Lohengrin.

But the more Elsa thought on the matter, the greater grew her unrest—louder, and ever more insistent, rang the question in her ear, "Who is this unknown one ? Whence comes he ?" No peace now for Elsa, day or night, until she can answer.

"Alas !" she cried, "it was by a miracle thou camest here ! Thy path is hidden, like thyself, in mystery. Thy life is divided from mine by a cloud

of night, into which thou mayest at any time return, leaving me alone in misery."

"Elsa, beloved, cease from these terrible fears. Never will I leave thee and thou doubt me not." Lohengrin took her hand in his and drew her gently towards the window.

The moonlight glittered on the River Scheld, as it wound like a silver thread through the quiet meadows, and far away out to sea.

Elsa fixed her eyes upon the river. By that shining watery path her love had come! How did she know that soon he might not return by the same mysterious way! To her terrified spirit it seemed that already she could see in the distance the faint outline of a large white bird, gliding swiftly nearer and nearer.

"Ah, look!" she cried, clutching wildly Lohengrin's arm. "Seest thou not the swan? He comes! There—down the river! He brings the boat! Thou hast called him!"

"Oh, Elsa, my beloved, cease this madness!" cried Lohengrin, in despair.

But Elsa was now beside herself. To her straining eyes, the fatal swan appeared to be speeding forward.

"This madness can never cease, and nothing

can give me peace again, till I know, even though it cost me my life—Who thou art, and whence thou comest?”

“In Heaven’s name, think, Elsa, what thou doest!” implored Lohengrin.

Elsa’s doubt was agony to herself, but she was now beyond the power of drawing back.

“Nay, I can bear this mystery no longer. I am compelled to ask thee—I must know—What is thy name?”

“Alas, alas! Woe be to us!” groaned Lohengrin, covering his face with his hands, as though he would fain shut out the fatal question.

“From whence comest thou? What is thy race?” repeated Elsa desperately.

So absorbed were they both, that they did not hear the stealthy tread upon the stair, nor the low, muffled voices outside the door.

Suddenly there was a crash. The door was broken open, and a group of dark figures, cloaked and masked, barred the passage, while one of the number rushed towards Lohengrin, drawing his naked sword.

It was the work of an instant. Lohengrin had but time to seize his sword, when the stalwart figure closed with him.

In the flickering torchlight, he parried the foe's first deadly thrust, and before he had time for a second, the trusty sword of Lohengrin had pierced to his traitorous heart. With a deep groan he fell back, and Elsa beheld, as she suspected, the face of Frederick of Telramund.

Hearing the noise, Elsa's attendants and guards now crowded into the room.

The dark masked figures had fled on seeing their master fall.

Lohengrin turned to the guards, and bade them bear the body of Telramund before the king's judgment-seat.

Then to Elsa's attendants, who supported their fainting mistress, he said sadly—

“Assist my sweet bride, and make her ready to appear before the king. There I will meet her, and give an answer, in the face of all men, to her question—Who I am, and from whence I come?”



CHAPTER VII



At noon next day, King Henry held a review of the troops in the meadow of the Judgment Oak.

Before leaving Antwerp, the king desired to collect forces for a war against the savage

Drohns, who were threatening the peace of Germany. Many a loyal Brabantian's sword was eagerly placed at his service, and among them also that of the unknown knight. The king counted greatly on his help, for never had he seen one more fitted to command and lead his troops.

But now the appointed hour had come, and still the king waited for the arrival of his unknown

general. His majesty was disturbed. He was not accustomed to wait for anyone.

Presently all were startled by the appearance of a solemn procession, bearing in their midst the body of a dead man.

"Make way!" whispered the crowd, awestruck. "These are the followers of Telramund."

Close on them followed Elsa and her ladies. Alas, how changed from the happy bride of yesterday!

The king thought her mournful appearance due to grief at the approaching parting with her bridegroom. He wished heartily he could have spared her such sorrow.

"Ah, here he comes! Our hero!" cried the people, as Lohengrin at length appeared.

"Welcome, Sir Knight," said the king. "We look to thee to lead these brave troops on to victory."

"Alas, my lord the king!" answered Lohengrin, "it is not possible for me now to lead thy soldiers, as I hoped."

"Heaven help us! What means this?" cried the king, dismayed, not only at Lohengrin's words, but by his sad, solemn bearing.

"Not as a comrade-in-arms, but as a plaintiff, do

“I come before thee, O king,” continued Lohengrin. “First, I ask thy righteous judgment, before all the people, concerning this man.” He pointed to the body of Telramund. “In the middle of the night, he fell on me unawares. Was I right in that I slew him?”

“Thy hand was but the instrument of a just Heaven in so slaying him!” replied the king, sternly regarding the dead traitor.

“Another complaint, alas! remains for me to make,” said Lohengrin. He looked towards Elsa. Her woeful aspect might have drawn tears from a stone. Perhaps, at this last moment, he hoped she might take back her fatal question. But no; though her head was bowed in misery, she gave no sign of recalling her words. Elsa felt still, that even at the cost of life itself she must know who was this, her love, and from whence he came. She believed that perfect love could never be, without perfect confidence; and with anything less than the Perfect and the Highest, poor Elsa could never rest content. So it was, she could not recall the question which still cried loudly as ever at her heart, demanding an answer.

“Ye heard all how she, my bride, gave me her promise, that never would she ask who I am or

from whence I came. Now, alas! she has broken that dear oath—she has listened to traitorous counsel!” Here he glanced towards a darkly-hooded figure who stood near the body of Telramund.

“Now hear, all ye people, whether my secret is one to be ashamed of before king, nobles, and the world!” Lohengrin raised his voice till it rang on all sides like a clarion.

“In a distant land, far from hence, is a mountain named Mount Salvat. In the midst stands a temple; none on earth can compare with its magnificence. Therein is guarded a sacred treasure, brought thither years ago by an angel-host. It is the Holy Grail. Every year a dove descends from heaven, renewing its miraculous power. The knight who serves the Grail derives divine strength from the power of its might. Before him evil flies, and death itself is vanquished. Even when far away in distant lands, so long as the knight remains unknown, the Grail still renews his strength. But the working of the Holy Grail must ever remain veiled. Once the source of mystery is revealed, the blessings granted must be withdrawn—such is the Grail’s command. I was hither sent to you by order of the Grail. My

father is Parsifal, the king — I am his warrior, Lohengrin !”

Elsa listened like one hearing his death-sentence. When Lohengrin concluded, her lips were white, the ground seemed heaving under her feet. Had not her ladies supported her, she must have fallen.

“All is dark as night! Give me air!” she murmured.

Lohengrin gazed at her with infinite pity and love.

“Oh, Elsa,” he cried mournfully, “why didst thou tear my secret from me? Now, alas, we are parted for ever!”

“The swan! The swan!” cried a chorus of voices near the bank of the river.

Elsa turned to look, and there, sailing swiftly towards them, came the snow-white swan, drawing the small boat in which the shining knight had arrived.

“The swan!” she shrieked.

Lohengrin took her tenderly in his arms.

“Oh, my beloved,” he said, “the Grail has sent for me—I dare not tarry. Alas, beloved Elsa, one year only, and I might have had the joy of seeing thee again united to thy long-lost brother. For he is not dead, and by the might of the Grail he

was then to be restored to thee. Now hearken. Should he return, give him these—my sword and horn and ring. The sword will bring him victory in battle, the horn will bring him help in time of need, and the ring he shall wear in memory of me. Farewell, my beloved bride ; farewell for ever !”

“Alas, the woeful day !” cried the king and all the people.

One only in that sorrowing crowd rejoiced.

Ortruda felt that, in spite of Telramund's death, her hour of vengeance had come at last. She exulted in Lohengrin's departure and Elsa's misery. The sight of the swan also gave her much satisfaction. Her spell still held the enchanted boy. Godfrey must remain dead to his sister till a greater power than even Ortruda possessed, freed him as by a miracle.

“And miracles are not wont to happen often,” muttered Ortruda grimly to herself.

Lohengrin placed the fainting Elsa in the arms of her maidens. He then bade farewell to all, and standing on the river's brim, was just prepared to step into the boat. Suddenly Ortruda saw him stoop and unfasten the small gold chain which encircled the swan's neck. She started, her eyes glaring horribly.



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“Ha! Treason! No human hand could unclasp that chain!” she gasped.

Instantly the swan bowed its long graceful neck, and dived down deep under the waters.

Another moment, and a tall fair boy stepped lightly to land.

Lohengrin took him by the hand and led him forward.

“Behold your rightful lord, the Duke of Brabant, he said to the astonished people. And while they crowded round the long-lost Prince Godfrey, Lohengrin stepped into the little boat.

Elsa fell into her brother’s arms with a cry of joy; then turned to look for Lohengrin, hoping that, now there was no swan to carry him away, he needs must stay.

But, alas! she beheld her knight already standing at the prow of the fatal boat. Above him hovered a snow-white dove, which slowly drew the boat away down the river, by means of a chain fastened round its neck.

Godfrey became a great and good prince—one of the best and wisest rulers Brabant ever knew. In after years he was wont to say, that he owed all the success and prosperity of his reign to the wise counsel of his beloved sister.

Elsa dwelt quietly at Antwerp, within the old grey palace; seldom going out into the world, except on some errand of mercy. But on summer evenings, when the sun had set, and the banks of the River Scheld were quiet and deserted, a solitary figure might sometimes be seen wandering up and down, gazing with straining eyes into the dim distance, while the breeze would carry down the stream the echo of a longing cry—

“Lohengrin, my beloved, come again to me!
Come once again!”

